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I. D. B.

OR

THE ADVENTURES OF SOLOMON DAVIS

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ON THE

DIAMOND FIELDS AND ELSEWHERE

BY

W. T. E.

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I. D. B.

OR

THE ADVENTURES OF SOLOMON DAVIS.

CHAPTER I.

ARCADES AMBO

SOLOMON DAVIS first saw the light—or rather as much of it as his infantile orbs were capable of admitting—through the grimy window-panes of a little bedroom, on the second floor of a seedy-looking tenement in the neighbourhood of Petticoat Lane. The date of this interesting event is involved in considerable mystery, but it is generally believed by the ladies of the Davis family to have occurred during the winter of the year 1853. We may take it at that, I think, without risking more than a month or two.

Solomon's father and mother, except when the latter was employed in the domestic engagements involved in the rearing of a large and constantly-increasing family, found congenial occupation in the management of a

fried-fish shop on the ground floor of the edifice aforesaid. At the back of this emporium was a small parlour, usually occupied of an evening by certain gentlemen of the Hebrew persuasion from the neighbourhood, who met there to indulge in a quiet game of hazard or solo whist. After the whist came a fish supper and sundry bottles of stout, and occasionally more potent fluids, produced from some mysterious repository by Davis *père*. At rare intervals an unwary Christian would be beguiled into joining the convivial party, and when that Christian returned—it sometimes happened that he did not return—to the bosom of his family, if he affected that luxury, he usually turned up in a very pitiable plight, and had a curious tale to relate of how he was robbed of everything he possessed, and knew nothing more of what happened to him until he was picked up, stupefied and half-naked, in some unfrequented street by the policeman, to whom he owed his restoration to his friends. The papers now and then got wind of occurrences of this kind, and did their best to make a fuss about them ; but the victims were generally too much ashamed of their folly in allowing themselves to be decoyed into such a den of thieves to make any attempt to expose them.

Several of the gang who met at Mr. Davis's establishment were welshers with much experience and many aliases. One or two were facetiously known as watch-makers—any crowd would serve these ingenious persons for a workshop, and they invariably dispensed with tools. Others were in the habit of hanging about the criminal courts, and devoted their talents to the proving

of apparently impossible alibis, and to other questionable legal enterprises. One and all of them were up to every known trick with the cards and dice; they looked upon the law as their natural enemy, the police as their pet aversion, and they regarded anything like honest industry or reputable handicraft as the sublimity of foolishness. They spent their money freely when they had it in pandering to grossly sensual appetites, the gratification of which represented their sole criterion of enjoyment. When cash was scarce they made a virtue of necessity, and abandoned their coarse pleasures for the less expensive amusement afforded by Mr. Davis's card-table, and the pretentious bills of fare of fourth-rate restaurants for the *ménu maigre* of his unassuming kitchen. Most of them, as in duty bound, aired their black suits and stove-pipe hats in synagogue on the day of atonement, when they howled away the transgressions of the previous twelve months in company with a crowd of temporarily mournful hypocrites like themselves, and then straightway went out of there with their monstrous noses elevated to catch scent of the first swindle that might be floating around. They usually spoke of themselves among themselves as *The School*; and a very nice school indeed they were to be entrusted with the education of Master Solomon Davis, the hero of this veracious history, and with that of his numerous brothers and sisters.

By the time Sol—as he was euphoniously called for brevity—had attained his fifteenth year, he was an exceedingly promising young apostle of iniquity. He could drink, smoke, swear, lie, and steal on occasion,

though he had not graduated as a professional thief, in the most accomplished manner, and had all the gutter slang and other polite metropolitan dialects on the tip of his saucy tongue. He knew all about feathering and bridging the cards, and, with the deal in his hand, he could win or lose as it might suit him. He would do the "fly-shuffle" under one's very nose so deftly that none but a brother sharper could perceive it; he played billiards like a professional or a novice, according to circumstances and the stakes; and though his reading was of the slowest, and his caligraphy barely legible, he was able to rattle off the calculations of a betting-book as quickly and correctly as if he had a Babbage's machine concealed beneath his curly scalp.

As we have said, Solomon had numerous brothers and sisters, but the only one of this highly interesting family, besides Solomon himself, with whom we have anything to do was his elder brother, Barnet, generally known as Barney, who, although some three years Solomon's senior, was very much his inferior both in talents and accomplishments. Barney was a sturdily-built youth, however, and, like most of those whose moral and physical training is acquired in the university of the streets of London, he could use his fists to very considerable purpose, an accomplishment which frequently proved the salvation of his younger brother.

Solomon's education being now, in the estimation of his father, sufficiently advanced to enable him to forage for himself, he was given to understand that the world was before him, and that, save as an occasional visitor, he was no longer to regard himself as a welcome inmate

of the paternal mansion. Possessed of unlimited confidence in his own resources, our hero was nothing loth to take the hint, and thus it came to pass that he and his brother Barney formed a predatory alliance, and fell into the habit of hunting together—making, as a rule, a very good thing of it.

It would be tedious to follow this well-matched pair through the vicissitudes which marked the next seven or eight years of their existence. During the greater portion of that period Solomon and Barney Davis managed to live indifferently well, by their own wits, on the innocence of other people. Solomon, although the younger of the two brothers, invariably took the lead in the invention and prosecution of the various complicated enterprises, upon the success of which the well-being of the fraternal treasury depended, and it was therefore only natural that he should come to be regarded as the leading partner in the firm. Barney's duller intellect never suffered him to originate anything beyond such vulgar pieces of chicanery as form the repertoire of the commonplace card-sharper or confidence trickster; Solomon's ambition, on the other hand, led him to aim at much more exalted conceptions, and his enterprises were for a long while successful, and the source of considerable revenue to the industrious pair.

At length, however, Master Solomon became involved in the explosion of a turf swindle of so glaring a character that he considered it advisable for both to disappear for a while from their accustomed haunts; and for nearly three years the fashionable card-parties of the

East End of London, and the suburban race meetings, ceased to be graced by the presence of the Messieurs Davis. I believe they wished it to be understood that this period of ostracism from the polite society of which they (or at any rate Solomon) had become luminaries, was passed on the Continent. Solomon has certainly been heard to make ambiguous references to Pairey and Boolong; but his entire innocence of *écarté*, *rouge-et-noir*, and baccarat is strong presumptive evidence against his ever having sojourned in the land of absinthe and wooden shoes. However, it is of no importance to this narrative whether the illustrious pair spent their involuntary vacation in Timbuctoo or Guam, wherever that mysterious seaport may be. It is sufficient to state that they disappeared for the period above mentioned, and that when they again condescended to shed the light of their crafty countenances upon their former London acquaintance, they found themselves in that unpleasant condition so graphically described by their own favourite formula—dead stone broke.

When they arrived at the paternal establishment near Petticoat Lane, their joint stock of worldly goods, including the garments which partially invested their persons, would not have been a profitable investment at a sovereign for the lot. Their boots were leaky, their hats chaotic ruins, their coats and trousers patched in all directions, white at the seams and shiny, deficient in buttons, and expressive of calamity; in fact, they presented a very sorry picture.

Davis senior welcomed his "tear poys" with such warmth of manner as he could muster for the occasion,

but it was evident the world had been using him none too kindly. He looked aged and careworn, and there was an air of discomfort about the place, and a constraint in the old gentleman's speech, which boded ill for the success of his dutiful sons' project of allowing him to support them for a while. Their mother was dead, and her place was filled by a large, repulsive-looking female whom Mr. Davis designated his housekeeper. Under her auspices the fish business did not appear to have prospered, and the two brothers could not help remarking that the junior members of the family, who came into the parlour one by one, and accorded them a half-sullen greeting, looked almost as pinched and out-at-elbows as they did themselves. Altogether it was anything but a pleasant home-coming; and Solomon and Barney, having brushed themselves up, and effected such temporary sartorial repairs as were possible with the appliances at command, borrowed a few shillings from the paternal exchequer, and retired to the bar-parlour of an adjacent public-house to discuss the situation, and a glass or two of rum-shrub, a compound to which I have remarked that gentlemen of the Hebrew persuasion are, as a rule, extremely partial.

The ups and downs of the past few years had left their mark very clearly upon the faces and persons of both brothers. Solomon was now the taller of the two by some inches, and looked more active, if possessed of less muscular strength, than his more sturdily-built brother. His features were tolerably regular and clearly cut; and his expression would have been almost pleasant but for the repulsive fulness of his lips, and the sinister

curves at the corners of his mouth, betraying greediness and cunning of no common intensity. Solomon's eyebrows very nearly met over his prominent nose, and this exhibition of mutual affection on their part added, in a disagreeable manner, to the sly expression of face imparted by his mouth. He wore a slight moustache, and incipient whiskers, of the same indefinite, ashen colour as his hair, which was thin and lanky; and his eyes, whose glance was constantly shifting, appeared grey, light blue, or yellowish-green, like those of a cat, according to the angle at which the light happened to fall on them. In figure he was slight but well proportioned, rather over than under the middle height; and he was remarkably proud of his hands, which were small, white, and exceedingly shapely considering his plebeian origin.

Barney, on the other hand, had developed into a squat, punchy, bull-necked, ungainly specimen of humanity. His features were those of his brother, inflated and flattened out, his nose having apparently suffered most in the process; the bridge had disappeared entirely, the result being a nasal organ of the inverted aquiline order. There was nothing about this pronounced snub to indicate the Hebrew origin of its proprietor, though it was evident that its present shape bore little resemblance to what would probably have been the result of the peaceful development of this portion of Barney's physiognomy. The fact is, that Barney's proboscis had been so badly broken on various occasions that its subsequent growth entirely departed from the plans laid down by the manufacturers; and its ultimate configuration

was the result of accident, and the knuckles of his quondam adversaries.

Solomon might easily have passed in a crowd as a respectable member of the middle class. Barney's frying-pan of a face, with its huge greedy-looking mouth, inquisitive comma of a nose, and staring watery eyes, his splay-footed walk, slouching carriage, and above all, his style of expressing himself, betrayed him at once for what he was—a Cockney-Hebrew of the lowest type.

The brothers took their seats in the snug, though none too clean, parlour of the 'Three Tuns' gave their orders to a gaudy young woman, who wafted about an extremely irritating atmosphere of hair oil and patchouli (and who appeared somewhat doubtful about serving the seedy-looking pair, until Solomon placed a coin on the table), and settled themselves for a comfortable confabulation. I have never tasted rum shrub myself, nor am I at all certain as to the nature of the ingredients which constitute the shrub section of the combination; but Barney said it was "cosher"; and, to judge from the rapidity with which three or four glasses of it raised the spirits of its two devotees from zero to somewhere in the neighbourhood of fever heat, I should be inclined to assert that it is an exhilarating beverage.

Solomon did most of the talking; he had a rapid, explosive style of firing his opinions at his audience that was wonderfully effective, especially when he was endeavouring to convince a stranger. The more earnest and excited he grew, the closer his face thrust itself into that of the person he was addressing, who naturally

kept on retreating from such embarrassing proximity. If he noticed this movement to the rear, Solomon would catch hold of his unfortunate listener by the coat, and keep jerking him up to scratch, as it were, whenever he showed symptoms of a retiring disposition. Barney, however, was quite used to his brother's style of emphasizing his arguments, and kept him at a respectful distance by means of a couple of chairs, which he employed simultaneously as footstool, arm-rest, and *chevaux de frise*.

What he had to say amounted to this: that something must be done, and done at once, by way of making a fresh start in the world. The "old un," as he irreverently styled his paternal ancestor, appeared to be about "stony," and even if "mechulah" were not trumps, and the old gentleman had "welled" a little, that house-keeper—here Barney interpolated a remark with regard to that lady's moral character—looked as if she could easily stop his "parting," if she wished; and wish, there was not the least reason to doubt, she would. For the present, it was evident that nothing worthy the name of enterprise could be undertaken, until, as Solomon expressed it, they had "faked" themselves up, and replenished their wardrobe. He supposed they might reckon on a lodging and the run of their teeth at their father's for a day or two at least, until they had time to look about them and turn themselves round; but, for his part, the shorter they could contrive to make the visit the better he should enjoy it. There had been no expression of grief, beyond the conventional half-suppressed snivel, on the part of either brother when the

decease of their mother was made known to them ; but the fact of her loss, and still more, the manner in which her place had been filled up, affected both more than they would have cared to confess ; and rendered the idea of sojourning beneath their father's roof, for any length of time, most objectionable to them.

The conversation between the two brothers continued by fits and starts until it was evident that both were thoroughly tired of talking. Approach the subject of their present position as they might, they could not get beyond the fact that the case was critical, and that something must be done without delay. As to what that something should be, neither brother seemed able to offer anything like a practical suggestion. Vague references to the advisability of leaving England and endeavouring to effect a fresh start in a new field were made more than once by Solomon, but Barney did not appear to notice them. Gradually, under the influence of repeated applications of alcohol, the conversation became sombre and disjointed ; and at length Solomon, irritated at Barney's inattention and monosyllabic replies to his remarks, jumped up, put on his battered hat with an air of sullen ill-temper, and bounced out of the room and the house, leaving his brother to follow or not, as he might choose. Barney rose, grumbling something about the folly of putting oneself in a "tear" about nothing, and sauntered lazily out after his junior.

Not a word was said by either on the way back to their father's, where they arrived just as the household was sitting down to a promiscuous sort of meal, by courtesy denominated supper. The viands displayed,

without any regard to symmetry of arrangement, upon the dirty and dilapidated cloth, which partially covered the nakedness of a rickety deal table, were certainly not remarkable either for variety or appetizing appearance or savour. There was a large dish of fish fried in butter or grease of some sort, which looked and smelt oleaginous, and rancid at that; and another dish containing slices of some very coarse fish smothered in a thick yellow sauce, the pungent odour of which indicated vinegar as one of its principal ingredients. A small plate of hot buttered toast graced the head of the table, where sat Mr. Davis, with a row of his immediate descendants on either side of him, whose expectant attitude—most of them had their mouths more or less wide open—was remarkably suggestive of a nest of young rooks awaiting the return of the parent birds from a foraging expedition.

An ancient metal teapot, with a dislocated handle, and abnormally twisted spout, occupied one hob of the tiny fire-place, which held a few handfuls of smoky small-coal; the hob on the other side being reserved for a disconsolate tin kettle, whose broken handle and knobless lid seemed to indicate a desire to retire from business at the earliest date compatible with its proprietor's convenience. The illumination of this convivial scene was partially effected by the fitful jets of flame which struggled with the smoke of the fire; but was mainly due to the rays of a paraffin lamp, which had originally been designed to fit an ornamental bracket, but had now nothing more elegant than an ordinary red flower-pot to look to for support. The lamp smoked,

and so did the fire ; and the smoke from both went up their respective chimneys, with the difference, that the smoke from the fire was placed to the credit of the external atmosphere, while that from the lamp was reserved for the benefit of the party round Mr. Davis's table.

The chairs, with the exception of an arm-chair occupied by the head of the family, and looking as if it had seen better days, were a heterogeneous collection of cripples, not one of which could boast of being in possession of its original number of members ; some had lost legs, some rails, some backs, some bottoms, and, in most cases, no attempt had been made to repair damages ; where such had been made they were of the most primitive and unsightly description. An ungainly, greasy deal cupboard occupied nearly the whole of one side of the room, a few dog's-eared books hung, desperately awry, in a swinging shelf over the mantelpiece, and four or five smoke-blackened chromo-lithographs, in equally smoke-blackened frames, from which the glass had long since disappeared, did their best to relieve the grimy monotony of the walls. A hideous piece of machinery, like an exaggerated gridiron—nothing more formidable than what is ironically termed a sofa-bedstead—was doubled up below the window, and partially disguised under a shabby rug. The window was curtainless, but as it gave on the back yard, that deficiency was not of much consequence, and the ragged yellow blind had jammed on the roller and could not be coaxed to cover more than half the glass, which, however, was so dirty that it was impossible to see

anything through it distinctly. Before the fireplace lay the remains of what had once been a gaudy hearth-rug, but it had lost so much of its nap from hard wear and frequent burns, that it resembled the outside of a singed cat, or a dog gone bald from mange. Carpet there was none, but as the boards were black with age and dirt, the absence of any covering was not so patent as would have been the case if the floor had retained its original complexion. The ceiling was slightly less black than the floor, and that is all that can be said for it.

The party round the table looked up as the two brothers entered, and Solomon, who was much more observant than Barney, noticed a momentary look of discontent on every countenance but that of his father, who seemed in better spirits, and gave them a more cordial welcome than when they had first met him some hours before. The conversation round the supper-table was on general topics, the two brothers taking but little share in it. The meal was over by seven o'clock, and as soon as the cloth and crockery had disappeared under the joint exertions of the housekeeper and the eldest Miss Davis, a black-eyed, red-lipped, curly-headed hoyden of some seventeen summers, the younger members of the family assorted themselves on the floor, or at the table, and proceeded to amuse themselves till bedtime. By the end of the first five minutes a battle royal was in full progress between two juvenile male Davises at the table over a game of all-fours, while a smaller brother and sister had introduced a foreign element, in the shape of a hair-pulling match, into a

game of dominoes, and the sounds of strife which came from the opposite side of the room showed that a contest which involved the exhibition of much muscular energy, and the fracture of many walnut-shells, was not being conducted upon strictly pacific principles.

The old gentleman had wheeled his chair back from the table and sat dozing, his bald head covered with a greasy black silk skull-cap, his spectacles tilted up high on his forehead, and his fat hands crossed lovingly over his waistcoat. He was evidently accustomed to the family Babel. It is wonderful through what an infernal hubbub a dutiful *pater familias* can educate himself to slumber, especially when he is aware, as Mr. Davis was, that the day when his remonstrance could effect anything towards quelling the riot has long ago departed. Had he been a younger man, and a more prosperous one, Mr. Davis would probably have had recourse to the public-house, the refuge of so many persecuted husbands and fathers. But he was too old, and either too poor or too miserly to care for obtaining such temporary respite from his domestic annoyances as the parlour of an inn might afford. And so, night after night, he was in the habit of sleeping, or pretending to sleep, through the din which prevailed from the time supper was cleared away till the departure of the younger members of the family to their dormitories.

It may easily be imagined that, in their present frame of mind, the racket soon became intolerably irritating to Barney and Solomon. At length the latter, after fidgeting and muttering for some minutes, jumped up, and drawing his arm through that of Barney, said, "Come

on ; it's a mug's game loafing here, let's do a stroll till bedtime."

"Where to? and what's the use?" objected Barney, pulling his arm away pettishly.

"Oh, anywhere out of this. I shall get the blues if I stop here."

"Blues be blowed ; I'm going to bed," returned Barney. And as his brother made his exit from the shop-door, he descended into the kitchen to make inquiries of the housekeeper as to the whereabouts of his sleeping quarters, where, as he was thoroughly tired out, we may as well leave him for the present.

CHAPTER II.

PIGEONS

SOLOMON DAVIS stuck his hands deep into his pockets and strode along at a pace that soon left his native neighbourhood, with its noisome odours and offensive sights, far behind him. He caught himself casting longing glances at the brightly-illuminated windows of the better class of taverns; and when he found himself among the theatres, he turned the odd silver in his pocket more than once, as if half inclined to treat himself to a seat in the gallery.

But he conquered the inclination, and continued walking fast, until he was checked by the stream of traffic passing through the gates in front of Charing Cross railway station. He sauntered into the station, and found the Continental express filling up rapidly. He attempted to pass the barrier on to the platform, but the ticket-collector, not admiring his appearance probably, refused to allow him through without a ticket, although Solomon stoutly asserted that his mother was in the train, and that events of the highest importance depended upon his having some conversation with her before she left. The stream of passengers was becoming thicker, and the ticket-collector, waxing impatient, pushed

Solomon away from the barrier, recommending him at the same time to "send a wire to Mrs. Moses," which would be delivered to her at Dover. Solomon indignantly repudiated the insinuation as to his nationality, and was proceeding to deliver himself of some very uncomplimentary opinions on the subject of the ticket-collector's birth and breeding, when a gigantic inspector walked him off to one of the exits, and, pointing through it, said: "Now, young man, this isn't Hampton race-course; and if you've got no business here, and you don't look as if you had any that would benefit the railway company or the public, I'll just trouble you to leave as soon as may be convenient."

"Well, I was thinking of travelling by the Dover express, but I've changed my mind," replied Solomon, slowly moving off. "You might deliver a message for me though."

"Well, what is it? make haste."

"Just give my kind regards to the Traffic Manager, and tell him I shall travel by the Chatham and Dover; the South-Eastern officials are a heap too polite for me. Good night."

A few steps brought him into the street, and a few more to the entrance of the billiard-rooms beneath the railway arches, where, in his palmy days, he had spent many a pleasant and profitable evening at the fascinating game of pool. The balls were clicking merrily, and the buzz of conversation, broken every now and then by the markers calling the scores, or the applause following a good stroke, sounded pleasant in Solomon's ears, and seemed to invite him to enter.

He looked down at his shabby clothes, and stamped his broken boot upon the pavement, with a muttered oath. He did not like to risk meeting any one who had known him before the reverse in his fortunes. At length, however, having persuaded himself that the seediness of his attire would most likely escape notice by gas-light, and that he might as well take his chance of being recognized by former companions now as later on, he straightened himself up, pushed open one of the swing doors, and marched in, as bold as if he had the Bank of England in his pocket.

The tobacco-smoke hung so thickly about the room that the lights over the tables looked like so many jack-o'-lanterns blinking through a fog, and it was several minutes before Solomon's eyes could accustom themselves to the haze sufficiently to enable him to make out what was going on around him. The seats nearest the entrance were occupied, and he had to pass five or six billiard-tables, all of which were in full blast, before he could find a place on one of the sofas. Two persons separated towards the ends of the seat, so as to make room for him, but they merely glanced up as he took his seat, and took no further notice of him, for which lack of attention on their part Solomon felt extremely grateful.

A game of billiards was in progress at the nearest table. The players were two youths, apparently fresh from school, and ignorant of the elements of the game, although they criticized each other's futile attempts to play, and cursed their luck, when they happened to have a more than usually narrow escape of fluking, in a

manner which was evidently expected to give the impression that these two champions were billiard-players and men-about-town of very considerable standing. The airs and graces assumed by this brace of tiros amused Solomon. Like all men who thoroughly understand the game, it galled him to see fine openings spoilt and good shots missed time after time; and he began unconsciously to deliver himself of a running commentary on the game, in a tone which, though too low to attract the notice of the players, was sufficiently audible to his right and left hand neighbours. The man on his right was the first to address him, and the conversation, at first confined to casual expressions of opinion on the game, gradually became more general, until Solomon found himself chatting quite freely to his unknown neighbour, a jovial-looking, middle-aged gentleman, who seemed to take a good deal of interest in the game they were watching.

Presently one of the players got the balls left so that by making a sharp screw he would score five. The stroke was a difficult one, as the player's ball lay in the jaws of the pocket, and the only way to manage the losing hazard was by striking it almost vertically with sufficient strength to cause the side to operate against the natural course of the ball, so as to bring it back into the pocket after the cannon was made. This *masse* shot, as our friends across the Channel call it, in the hands of a man who understands what he is about, can be made to produce cannons round loaves of bread, from one table to another, and many other wonderful and eccentric evolutions; but in the hands of a beginner, especially when he is afflicted with the delusion that he can play,

and therefore possesses sufficient confidence to put some powder into his strokes, this vertical shot is the most dangerous on the table, and frequently leaves a considerable hole in the cloth and in the pocket of the would-be player who attempted it.

Solomon watched the youngster at the table as he chalked his cue, and then raised himself on tip-toe, balancing himself on the tips of his left fingers, his cue held high in the air over his right shoulder, but over instead of underhanded. The cue descended, and the player came down off his hind-legs, and stood once more on his allotted portion of *terra firma*, as he contemplated, with a scared expression, two sides of an equilateral triangle neatly cut out on the cloth, to the extent of about twelve inches each way.

"Well, I'm blessed, that's a sweet thing in tears," observed Solomon's right-hand neighbour. "Just what I expected though; serves the young donkey right."

Solomon whistled gently by way of acquiescence, and got up to examine the damage. The marker had left the board at the other end of the table, and was measuring the cut with his pocket-handkerchief in a grave and business-like manner.

"Shall have to charge you for a new cloth, sir," he remarked; "it's a pity, too, for this was only put on last week."

"Last year, you mean," said Solomon; "why, it's as threadbare and rotten as"—and he looked down at his coat—"an old hat."

The marker turned round sharp at this, and was about to resent the interference in no temperate terms,

when the youth who had done the mischief, pulling a handful of gold from his pocket, and looking uncommonly sheepish, interposed with, "Oh, never mind arguing about it, I've cut the confounded cloth, and I'm perfectly willing to pay for it, if you will let me know the figure. Come, how much is it?"

This, and the sight of the money, mollified the irate marker at once, and after another examination of the wound, he said, "Well, sir, the cloth is ruined so far as this table is concerned, but I dare say we can use part of it for one of the American tables; you see, it would be useless to sew it up, for there would always be a big seam right over the pocket, and—"

"Never mind all that, man," interrupted the youngster, chinking the coins in his hand; "name your price, and I'll pay it. I don't want the whole room bothering here."

"Well, say seven pound ten, sir," said the marker, half-questioningly, as if he would have liked to say more, but feared interference from the bystanders, a good many of whom had congregated about the damaged table.

"There you are then, and there's ten bob for yourself. I suppose you won't charge us for the game," said the youth, laughing, as he handed him the money.

"Much obliged to you, I'm sure, sir. You see, these accidents will happen sometimes, even to the best of players; and as I'm responsible for the table, I have to see that gentlemen pay up. Good evening, gentlemen, hope to see you here again; no offence, I hope?"

"Not the least, I assure you," answered young hope-

ful, getting into his overcoat. "Come along, Waggles, let's go and drown our sorrows in a brandy and soda." And he was walking off with his friend, when something struck him, and he turned round and invited Solomon and the other occupants of the seat to join them.

The invitation was at once accepted, and the five sauntered leisurely towards the bar. Cigars naturally succeeded drinks, and Solomon soon found himself seated at a small marble-topped table, chattering away to his new acquaintances as merrily as if he had nothing more to worry him than appeared to be the case with them.

But although his tongue was wagging nineteen to the dozen, Solomon was thinking very little of what he was saying. He had carefully assessed the two youngsters who were now acting as his hosts, and put them down as a brace of pigeons whose plucking would be an extremely agreeable and desirable enterprise. But he could do nothing safely in that line without a confederate, and he put together some very naughty sentiments, mentally, as he thought of what might have been attempted had Barney been on hand.

Failing his brother, Solomon had been investigating the countenances of his recent neighbours, and was a good deal puzzled at the result of his examination. Both were apparently men of middle age, their costume and general appearance were sober and highly respectable, their manners and conversation those of gentlemen. But Solomon felt certain they understood each other, and made up his mind that, if possible, he would join the partnership, in case these two worthies should

attempt to assume the *rôle* of hawks towards the two greenhorns who were entertaining them.

Presently the taller of the two, who had occupied the seat on Solomon's right, ordered another instalment of lubricants, and as the waiter placed them on the table, observed, "Well, gentlemen, this is a very pleasant meeting, although brought about by an awkward contretemps, and rather an expensive one for you, sir," addressing the youth who had cut the cloth. "However, as the marker very wisely remarked, these accidents will happen,—I've no doubt he wishes they'd happen every evening at the rate you paid him,—and if you never cut anything worse than a billiard-cloth, your score won't be a very black one when it comes to the general settling-day. What I wanted to say, however, is that my friend and I will be extremely gratified if you will give us the pleasure of your further acquaintance, and, as we have begun the evening so pleasantly, I dare say, if you have nothing better to do, that we can arrange to conclude it in an equally agreeable manner. My name, gentlemen, is Cormack, Captain by courtesy, for I have left the service, and my friend here is Doctor Bunton, and, if he will allow me to speak for him, I may add that we are both very much at your service."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said the author of the damage to the billiard-table. "My name is Hayes, Frank Hayes, and my friend here is Mr. Walter Caldecott, commonly known as Waggles; we're old schoolfellows, and are now supposed to be coaching for the Indian Civil Service. I dare say you've

heard of Bird, the crammer at Bayswater. Well, we're with him. He's a regular brick, you know, no strait-laced, go-to-meeting nonsense about him; lets us do pretty much as we like, provided our governors come down with the dust all right—and, well, suppose we shake hands all round and make a night of it."

Captain Cormack looked across at Solomon and winked in a manner which immediately set that young gentleman completely at his ease.

"My name is Davis, gentlemen," said he, stretching over to take part in the general hand-shaking, "and I have much pleasure in seconding the Captain's proposition; it's confoundedly hot and stuffy in here, any change will be an improvement."

The Captain's wink had conveyed volumes to Solomon, who scarcely required a supplementary hint from the *ci-devant* warrior, in the shape of a rapid gesture suggestive of cutting a pack of cards, to comprehend what was meant.

The five gentlemen rose by common consent and made their way to the door, the Captain whispering in Solomon's ear as they were passing out, "Nap; are you fly?"

"Bet your boots; how's your chum?"

"Oh, he won't play; looks after the liquors, d' you tumble?"

"You'll have to lend me a quid or two to start."

"That's all right: here's five. We'll break 'em easy enough; what do you reckon it's worth?"

"Can't tell; saw about fifty when he paid that thief of a marker. It ought to be good for a century with the

other one; he's got a diamond ring on that ought to go a monkey at least—and then there's the chance of flimsies."

"Well, I think it's a very fair plant. I'm going to take you all to my rooms, and we'll have supper and some fizz. Leave me to introduce the cards; they'll rise sharp enough, never fear. And, I say, look here, whatever you do, don't talk slang; sit where I put you at the card-table, and be merciful to the champagne."

"Right you are, Captain, it's a go," replied Solomon, as the party emerged into the street.

"Doctor," said the Captain, as his friend and his two companions faced round and waited for Solomon and his ally, "I've just been remarking to my friend here that although whisky and soda is a very pleasant beverage when one is hot and thirsty, it plays the very mischief with one's digestion when indulged in on an empty stomach; and that being the case, I was thinking that we might as well adjourn to my rooms close by, and see what can be done in the way of supper, before we prosecute our nocturnal adventures further."

This proposal met with slight opposition on the part of Mr. Hayes, who was generously inclined to entertain the whole party at a neighbouring restaurant of which he spoke most enthusiastically, but was eventually adopted.

A few minutes afterwards they found themselves standing in front of a dingy, old-fashioned-looking house, in one of the streets that lead from the Strand to the river-bank, the front-door of which yielded to the latch-key of their host, and allowed them entrance to the hall,

only redeemed from absolute darkness by a twinkle of gas from a bracket lamp at the foot of the staircase.

Captain Cormack struck a hand-bell, which was answered by a smartly-dressed female with the usual query: "Did you ring, sir?"

"I've brought some friends to supper, Jane: it's short notice, so we shall not be very exacting; do the best you can for us,—a lobster salad, some oysters, anything you can manage,—and I'll be down when you are ready and see about the wine. Now, gentlemen, let us go upstairs and have a cigar."

He led the way into the back drawing-room, a fair-sized, cosy apartment, lighted by a handsome glass chandelier, and furnished more luxuriously than the external appearance of the house would lead one to expect. In one corner stood a card-table, upon which were a pair of silver candlesticks and a couple of packs of plain-backed cards. Two mirrors, in frames of exquisite workmanship, were suspended at an angle from the walls behind this table, an arrangement which produced a quiet smile from Master Solomon, who appeared to take more interest in the card-table and its surroundings than in the tasteful knick-knacks and ornaments which were scattered about the room in the careless and disorderly fashion that one commonly finds in bachelor establishments.

The windows were concealed by heavy curtains, and the carpet was so thick that it felt like a bed of moss under one's tread, which was as noiseless as that of a ghost in list slippers. Pipes of all shapes, sizes, and materials lay about the mantelpiece and upon a round

table in the centre of the room, upon which also stood a large cigar-cabinet of amboyna wood. Books, periodicals, and newspapers were scattered about in profusion; and a large easy-chair, with a book-rest fixed on the left arm, indicated that the proprietor of the apartment knew how to take his literature like a Sybarite.

This arrangement took the fancy of Mr. Hayes immensely. He threw himself into the chair, stretched his feet on to the fender, and pulled the rest into focus. "By Jove, Waggles, this is a grand invention: I'll get a chair like this fixed up in my study to-morrow. A man who does his reading in a machine like this couldn't get ploughed if he tried. I say, Captain, if it isn't a rude question, I wish you'd put me up to where I can get a second edition of this chair."

The Captain was handing round cigars, and offered his interrogator a well-filled silver case, saying: "You'll find the big ones good, they're Murias; the little ones are Partagas, mild, but respectable smoking. About the chair; it's rather odd that you should at once appreciate its fitness for the very purpose with which it was presented to me. That chair, rest and all, just as it stands, was given to me by my father, years ago, when I was a young man at Cambridge, to encourage my researches in abstruse mathematics. I've solved some extraordinary problems by the aid of that old chair, in my sleep. But I could never keep awake for five consecutive minutes in it, all the time I was at College. I don't know where my father picked it up, but there's a fellow advertises something very like it in Oxford Street, I think. Now I'll get you to excuse

me for a few minutes, while I go and see what Jane is about. Doctor, make yourself agreeable; Mr. Davis, you'll find the evening papers on the table, or the floor. There's a piano,"—pointing to a Broadwood semi-grand, in one of the corners,—“if any one feels musically inclined; but I warn you, whatever you do, don't ask Bunton to sing.” Saying which, with a mischievous grin at the doctor, he left the room.

The conversation between Hayes, Caldecott, who had hitherto spoken very little, and the doctor became animated, and enabled Solomon, who had walked over to the piano, and was twisting himself round on the music-stool in front of it, to have a good look at Doctor Bunton.

He was a little man, considerably under the middle height, with sharp aquiline features, and a restless, black, penetrating eye, which seemed to see everything, but said nothing in return; for it was so hidden by the bushy, overhanging eyebrow, that only part of the pupil and iris was visible. Doctor Bunton wore a heavy, military moustache, which, like his close-cropped hair, was of that purple black hue so suggestive of nitrate of silver. His hands were small, white, and to Solomon's keen eye, looked as if they could manipulate other articles besides surgical instruments. His speaking voice, an unctuous, apparently artificially-modulated tenor, reminded one of amateur Italian opera love-making, the only thing, in fact, about the man that didn't seem to fit him.

“Knows a thing or two, that bloke,” thought Solomon. “I'd sooner be pals with him than the other way. I wonder if he means to hocus the two flats.”

Having described his friend the doctor, it will be as well to say a word or two of the Captain's personal appearance. He was the very antipodes of Doctor Bunton: a handsome, erect, florid-faced, big-voiced Hercules, standing over six feet, pulling the beam at fifteen stone; with clear, well-opened grey eyes, a full fair beard and moustache, just beginning to show the marks of the avenger, and curly hair, thinned a little about the temples and the top of the head; the sort of man one would set down at first sight as an ex-military man of comfortable means, for whom life has no cares beyond the ordering of his dinner, the discovery of weight-carrying hunters, and the replenishing of his wine-bins.

Solomon, however, was sufficiently versed in the ways of the world to know that both men and things are seldom what they seem; and although he understood nothing at all about Latin, with the exception of the modern dialect spoken by the gamins of the East End, he was in the habit of shaping his life by the aristocratic maxim, *nil admirari*. It mattered little to him what the doctor and the Captain might pretend to be, so long as he could manage to turn their acquaintance to his personal advantage; which, by this time, he felt perfectly confident of doing.

Captain Cormack walked into the room just as Solomon had concluded his inspection of the doctor; and seeing him sitting apart from the others, came up and put his hand on his shoulder, slightly lifting him, at the same time, as a hint to accept his invitation to wash his hands in the next room.

The Captain's dressing-room was a comfortable snug-gery, containing, besides the usual paraphernalia of the masculine toilet, a regular armoury of smooth-bores, rifles, swords, and pistols, a heterogeneous collection of fishing-rods, riding-whips, and race-glasses, and a host of other sporting lumber. As he closed the door he again brought his powerful fist down on Solomon's shoulder, and looking him full in the eyes, said: "I suppose you've been puzzling your brains to discover what on earth induced me to bring you here to-night, eh?"

"Well, I did think it was rather a queer start at first, but I think I understand now," replied Solomon, with a quiet smile, but not flinching in the least before the other's steady gaze. "You wanted a confederate, and you were afraid to trust the doctor."

"Not that by any means; Bunton's as straight as a die, but useless to me at cards—takes no interest in them, thinks them contemptible as a means of earning a living. I don't. I take what comes as it comes, and divide with him. It's a thousand pities he's cut the cards, for he can do more with them than any man I ever met—"

"I guessed he was clever from his hands," interrupted Solomon.

"Clever's no word for it; he'd play Old Scratch for his shirt, if he wears one, and beat him; but he's given up paste-board, and goes in for joint-stock companies and that sort of thing now. We work it between us, you see. Well, I saw to-night that those two pigeons wanted plucking, and I was half inclined to undertake

it single-handed, with the aid of some of the doctor's champagne. But when you came into the billiard-room I took your measure in a minute, and here you are. I'll treat you fairly, whatever the result may be ; your head's screwed on straight enough, and I may be able to put other things in the way of a smart lad like you, if you act square in this."

"That's understood," said Solomon, who had dried his hands, and was preparing to put on his coat.

"Look here, put yourself into this smoking-jacket," said the Captain, handing him a black velvet garment, "your coat's a trifle seedy ; and here's a pair of slippers. No thanks, man, I like my friends to be comfortable."

The jacket was certainly rather a loose fit, and Solomon found some difficulty in keeping his feet in the slippers, which were half-a-dozen sizes too large for him, but he felt and looked all the better for the change.

"I feel quite the aristocrat in this rig," he remarked, surveying himself in a cheval glass. "I've been rather down on my luck of late, Captain, and was just looking about for a chance of pulling in a little."

"Well, come along. I'm very much mistaken if we don't make a very decent haul out of those two duffers to-night."

The pair returned to the drawing-room, and the whole party at once adjourned to the dining-room downstairs, where they found supper awaiting them.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

SUPPER passed off in the pleasantest possible manner. The oysters were excellent, so was the lobster-salad, and Jane had contrived to add several other savoury dishes, so that the bill of fare was by no means a bad one, considering the entertainment had been got up at a moment's notice. Some very fine Sauterne was served with the oysters ; after which the Captain dived into the ice-pail at his side, and produced several frosty-looking bottles of Pommery, to which the two youngsters devoted themselves after the manner of their kind, and utterly regardless of consequences.

Solomon drank but little, and the Captain and doctor imitated his example. Hayes began to relate wonderful stories of his prowess in the hunting-field ; and his friend took Solomon into his confidence regarding certain amiable escapades, in the accomplishment of which he had risked his life in a reckless and dare-devil manner which would have done credit to Don Juan, and enabled Lord Byron, had he been alive and acquainted with the heroic Waggles, to have indited a second and even more sensational account of the adventures of a young gentleman whose principal mission on

earth appeared to be the infraction of the seventh commandment.

The Captain pressed Solomon and the doctor to take more wine, "just one glass, as a wind-up, before we go upstairs." Hayes and his friend needed no encouragement, indeed their host was becoming alarmed lest they should have absorbed too much for his purpose already. At length the whole party pushed their chairs back, and waited for the order of the night from the Captain.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, consulting a handsome gold watch, "it's close on eleven o'clock; too late for any of the shows except the Alhambra, and there's only a very stupid ballet and some rubbishing music-hall business to be had there. But if any of you feel inclined for dancing, I can introduce you to a select establishment, kept by a little friend of mine a few doors off, where, for a sovereign, you will be privileged to poison yourselves with public-house champagne, and kick your heels with a lot of scantily-draped Bacchantes till morning. We can make up a quiet game of pool at the private rooms in —— Street, or we can toddle upstairs and have a rubber of whist. There, gentlemen, my repertoire of amusements is exhausted."

"I vote we taboo the Alhambra without discussion," said Hayes; "one might as well go to church as go there for amusement now-a-days; as for dancing, it's too hot for one thing, and it would be rank sacrilege to descend to gooseberry after such magnificent wine as you have given us; for myself and Waggles, I think I may say we have had enough of the billiard-table for

to-night, and pool is hard labour after supper. My sympathies are entirely in favour of your last proposition, Captain, but I should like to propose an amendment. Whist is a great strain on one's mental powers, and there are five of us, so that one would have to stand out. I move, then, that the noble game of Nap be substituted for whist. What say you?"

"Nap, by all means," said Caldecott and Solomon together.

"I never touch cards," observed the doctor, "but I admit that Nap is a livelier game for the spectators than whist."

"Nap be it then," said the Captain, rising, and the whole party followed him upstairs, where the doctor made himself comfortable in an arm-chair, so that he could overlook two of the players direct, while the other two hands were visible without much difficulty in the mirrors on the wall. The other four sat down at the card-table, the Captain facing Hayes, and Solomon with Caldecott as his *vis-à-vis*; the looking-glasses, it need hardly be stated, at the backs of the two youngsters, in front of whom the candles were placed, so as to throw a strong light on to their cards.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Captain, "as my guests, I will leave you to arrange the stakes," and he placed a pile of gold and silver carelessly by his side. "For my own part I don't care about extensive gambling. I leave it entirely to you, however."

"We generally play sovereign and five shillings," said Hayes, producing a considerable sum in gold. "One can't lose a fortune at that, Captain."

"Anything will suit me," replied the person addressed. "Are you agreeable to that, gentlemen?" to Solomon and Mr. Caldecott.

"Certainly, that will do nicely," answered Solomon, and the other nodded, as he was lighting a cigar. "Is it to be single Nap or treble? I think treble is far the best fun."

"Oh, let's have Blucher and Wellington by all means," said Hayes.

"That's agreed then," said the Captain; "let us cut for deal."

The first deal fell to Solomon, and the Captain called four on a doubtful three hand and lost it. In the next deal Mr. Hayes called three and took it home, much to his delight. Then the deal went round four or five times, the Captain losing several calls, Solomon scoring a three, and the other two coming out about level.

There was now a very respectable-sized heap of gold in the pool, and as the deal came to Solomon, he glanced for a moment inquiringly at the Captain while engaged in shuffling the pack. The slightest possible depression of Cormack's eyebrows told him that the time for sleight-of-hand business had not come yet, and he dealt the hand round as usual. Caldecott called Nap, and Hayes went Blucher and took the pool, the doctor applauding him cordially.

"Well, suppose we have a refresher after that," suggested the Captain.

"Very good idea," said Hayes; "I'm as dry as the rich man in the Bible."

The doctor was despatched with instructions for

Jane, who presently entered the room, carrying a large basket of soda and seltzer, and a silver stand containing decanters of whisky and brandy, which she placed handy for the card-players. The game was in progress, and the doctor good-naturedly offered to compound drinks for the players, who were soon provided with tall glasses of effervescent fluid, which sparkled and looked uncommonly tempting in the candle-light. Whether or no Doctor Bunton had, as Solomon would call it, hoccussed the liquor, I am unable to say, but it is certain that Messrs. Hayes and Caldecott became even more hilarious as the contents of their glasses disappeared, whereas what the others imbibed seemed to take no effect whatever upon them.

The play waxed fast and furious; both Solomon and the Captain appeared to enter into the spirit of the thing, and the pool speedily mounted up until it was worth over fifty pounds.

As the deal came round to Solomon, he looked up at the Captain, who this time responded with a scarcely perceptible wink. The cards were lying face upwards in the centre of the table as they had been pushed or thrown there by the players.

Solomon proceeded to take them up, while Cormack emptied the little silver ash-holder which contained the pool, and counted the contents.

"Fifty, close on sixty; well, it's worth going for. Any one like to give me odds it isn't taken this deal?" asked he.

"I'll lay you ten to one about it," said Solomon, dealing the cards.

"I don't mind the same, Captain," added Hayes, piling ten sovereigns up beside the candlestick on his right.

"You can have it from me too," said Caldecott, following his example.

"Done with you all; in sovs, I suppose?" queried Cormack.

The three nodded. It was the Captain's call. After shifting his cards about for fully a minute he sat back in his chair, and turned his hand down on the table. "By Jove, I'll risk it. Nap!"

After some hesitation the others all passed.

Cormack played his hand—ace, king, knave of clubs, and ace and queen of diamonds.

"A cast-iron Nap that," said Hayes, as the Captain gathered the pool and the three ten-pound heaps into his corner; "I was almost going Blucher. If I had, Waggles or Mr. Davis would have called Wellington, and I should have had to call upon my uncle to-morrow morning."

"Not so bad as that yet, I hope," said the Captain, laughing, and bestowing a diabolical wink upon Solomon at the same time. "As a rule I'm the unluckiest Nap-player going; it's a miracle for me to take a pool, I assure you. Come, doctor, don't go to sleep, man; make yourself useful and fill our glasses, if you won't take a hand in emptying our pockets."

The doctor did as he was desired, and the game proceeded. Hayes presently produced some notes, his supply of coin being exhausted; and it was not long before he had again to have recourse to his pocket-book. Caldecott was losing heavily also, but, like his

friend, seemed to think it rather good fun than otherwise. Solomon and the Captain continued as cool as a couple of cucumbers, but the other two were evidently losing their heads, and began to play wild. Between them, Solomon and Cormack had pocketed close upon £300, when a church clock close by struck five. By this time Hayes and Caldecott were a good deal mixed, and so desperately sleepy that it was with great difficulty they managed to keep their eyes open.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Captain, "I don't know how you feel, but I fancy I've had about enough of it. What do you say to knocking off when the next Nap's taken?"

This was at once agreed to. Hayes and his friend were both feeling very queer, longing to be safe at home, and more than a little puzzled as to how they should contrive to get there decorously. The doctor had been fast asleep in his chair for the last two hours, with his boots off and his handkerchief thrown over his face.

The game went on, and the Nap, a tolerably heavy one, fell to Solomon. The players rose, yawning and stretching, and the Captain went to one of the windows, drew back the curtains, and let the uncomfortable grey light into the room, which set them all blinking so that they couldn't help laughing at each other.

"Well, it's no good thinking of going to bed now, that's certain," remarked the doctor, who had just awakened: "the best thing you people can do is to take a good smart walk, that will take the cobwebs out of your brains and give you an appetite for breakfast."

"Walk ! I wouldn't attempt to walk a hundred yards to save my immortal soul," observed Caldecott, sinking sleepily into an easy-chair ; " I'm regularly fagged."

" So you deserve to be after last night's dissipation," laughed the doctor ; " I see I must take you in charge. Cormack, is it possible that that inestimable domestic of yours is visible at this unearthly hour ?"

" What, Jane ? I dare say she is. At any rate we can but try," and he pulled one of the bells at the side of the fireplace.

Jane tripped into the room, looking fresher, and rosier, and smarter than ever.

" Is the milk come, Jane, my dear ?" inquired the doctor.

" No, sir ; but I can run out and get some."

" Very well, and bring a dozen new-laid eggs if you can get them."

A few minutes afterwards the doctor was hard at work compounding a mixture which he informed his patients possessed a high reputation in tropical climates as a matutinal reviver.

First he carefully broke the eggs, discarding the white, and throwing the yolk into a silver soup-tureen which Jane had brought at his bidding ; next came five teaspoonfuls of sugar, which the doctor proceeded to beat up with the contents of the tureen in a thoroughly scientific and workman-like manner. Then he measured out three wine-glasses of brandy and one of rum, and added them to the mixture, which he continued to beat with his egg-whisk for some seconds. The next operation was to add the milk, which he poured in with his

left hand, while he kept his whisk at work with his right. A dash of nutmeg and the smallest pinch of cayenne-pepper put the finishing touch to the beverage, which the compounder presented to his friends, remarking—"There, gentlemen, just try that; it will do you more good than all the physic in creation."

"I feel like a giant refreshed," said the Captain, as he put down his glass; and the others signified unqualified approval of the prescription.

"So far so good. Now, Captain, have your bath-room got ready, and we'll toss for places and indulge in a shower; and then, unless I'm very much mistaken, we shall begin to feel a good deal like breakfast, and a run out of town afterwards," said Bunton.

All except Solomon decided to follow the doctor's advice. Our hero took Cormack into the dressing-room, and after balancing accounts and dividing the spoil, returned the smoking-jacket and slippers, and took his departure, promising to be back in a couple of hours' time for breakfast.

On reaching the Strand, Solomon hailed an early hansom, and directed the driver to set him down at a well-known clothing establishment in Oxford Street, the shutters of which were just being removed by a couple of sleepy shop-boys as he drove up. A quarter of an hour sufficed to turn our hero out in a fashionable morning suit, which fitted him as well as if he had been measured for it. From top to toe he cast off his own well-worn raiment, and replaced it with the best he could purchase.

His next visit was to a barber, who sent him forth still

further improved in appearance, and he wound up by calling on a pawnbroker, from whom he purchased a handsome second-hand gold watch and chain, a heavy signet-ring bearing an imposing crest, and a very effective set of studs and solitaires, all of which he put on before leaving the shop.

The transformation was simply marvellous ; Solomon could with difficulty persuade himself of his identity as he caught sight of his figure in the shop-windows.

He had still considerably over a hundred pounds in gold when his purchases were completed, and he entered a quiet restaurant and ordered an egg and a cup of coffee in order to give himself time to think over what he should do with it.

Solomon had never known the luxury of revelling in the possession of a banking account, and the more he thought over the matter, the clearer it seemed to him that this was decidedly the safest way of disposing of his wealth for the present. The banks, however, were not open till nine o'clock, and he was due at the Captain's at eight.

Suddenly a bright idea struck him. He paid for his breakfast, which he had scarcely touched, and made his way to an outfitter's shop near Piccadilly Circus, where he purchased a Gladstone bag, filled it with linen, toilet requisites, and such odds and ends as a gentleman usually encumbers himself with when travelling ; put it and himself into a hansom, and presently alighted at Hatchet's hotel.

Here he engaged a room, and, asking to see the manager, deposited his hundred pounds with him for

safe-keeping, taking his receipt for the amount, and saying that he should be in town for a few days, but might possibly not be back till late that evening. It was close upon eight o'clock by this time, and Solomon walked briskly along towards the Captain's quarters, pondering over the night's adventure, and trying to see how it could be further turned to advantage.

Once or twice he thought of Barney; he was glad that his brother had elected to remain at home the previous evening, for he knew that Barney's presence would have been an effectual bar to his making the acquaintance of the Captain and his friend. Barney was all very well in his own place, but he was low; and Solomon almost decided that he would let Barney go altogether, and endeavour to join the enterprising pair of manipulators, to whose acquaintance he owed his present rise to comparative prosperity. If Barney should find him out and persist in claiming relationship, he could easily pension him off; anything, he argued with himself, would be better than to lose a good chance because his brother was not sufficiently civilized to be presentable.

On reaching the Captain's lodgings, Solomon found the quartet and breakfast awaiting him. The doctor whispered, as he shook hands and jocularly wished him good morning, "Deuced good move that, my boy; I was going to suggest something of the kind, but felt it was delicate ground. The fit is splendid. They're not cleaned out yet; you and Cormack have a good day's work before you. I'm prevented from joining you by important business in the City," and he grinned.

"I hope you've not been waiting for me," said Solomon, as the party seated themselves at table ; "the fact is, I'd been travelling all yesterday, and was so done up when I got to Hatchet's, that I just took a snack and went out for a stroll without changing ; and when I got there this morning, I found I'd lost the key of my portmanteau, and they had to send for a locksmith to open it. That is what kept me so long."

"We haven't been waiting five minutes," said the Captain, cordially admiring our hero's neat and suggestive explanation. "Jane isn't used to early breakfasts ; she's had to forage the whole neighbourhood to get us something to eat. Doctor, grace if you please."

"Gentlemen, sling in," said Bunton.

Breakfast passed off merrily. Cigars and cigarettes followed. Presently the doctor looked at his watch. "Bless me, half-past nine ; I must be off to the City. I shall lunch in Gresham Street, Cormack, and don't suppose I shall be back much before five. What do you propose doing with yourselves ?" he asked.

"Well, a little fresh air would be no bad thing by way of a change," said the Captain. "What do you think, gentlemen ?"

"Waggles and I have nothing to do, and if we had I'm sure we shouldn't do it," said Hayes. "It's a glorious day, and I think a spin on the river, or something of that kind, would be exactly the ticket."

Solomon signified his readiness to fall in with any scheme for the general amusement.

"Suppose, then, we run down to Hampton Court, amuse ourselves there for an hour or two, have lunch,

pull down to Richmond for dinner, and suit ourselves as to our train to town?" suggested the Captain.

"I don't think you can improve upon that," said the doctor; "and if you'll name your inn and time, I'll join you at dinner, unless I should be detained in the City."

"Say the Castle, seven o'clock," said Hayes; "the Star and Garter is too far from the station, and the waiters there are so stiff, they always scare my appetite away."

"Content," said the Captain, while the others signified their approval, and the doctor bade them *au revoir*.

Arrived at Waterloo, the party found they had half an hour to wait, and sought refuge, after the manner of their kind, in the refreshment-room, where Hayes and Caldecott at once established a chaffing flirtation with the best-looking of the barmaids. The Captain presently drew Solomon's arm through his own, and leaving the others in the refreshment-room, they sauntered up and down the platform, conversing in low tones.

"That was a very nice little haul last night. I couldn't have managed it alone though," said the Captain; "you manipulated those big Naps beautifully."

"Oh, that was very easy with such a pair of green-horns," said Solomon. "Do you think there's much more in it?"

"Never fear. Hayes got quite confidential before you came in to breakfast. His father's an Indian swell, as rich as Croesus, and a baronet to boot. The other one says his dad was a merchant at Bombay; he has a brace of bankers for his guardians, and you know what that means."

"That sounds well, certainly. Then it won't do to work them for all they're worth on the first deal, I suppose?" asked Solomon.

"No, that would be the goose and golden egg business. We must humour our young capitalists, and drain them by degrees, and then wind them up on a petition, as the doctor does his companies. But come along, here's the train, we must get our tickets."

Of course Hayes insisted on tossing who should pay for the four. Solomon lost; he began to think it was time he should pay for something. If they tossed for tickets, he calculated that they would be sure to toss for lunch and other expenses, and he would probably be invited to stand out. He therefore considered the few shillings expended on railway fare a good investment.

The train crawled down to Hampton Court, and the rickety old engine coughed and grunted as if it didn't consider the train worth hauling; which, from a financial point of view, it certainly was not.

At the time I am writing of the Hampton Court branch must have been very unhealthy travelling, for I noticed that the locomotives employed on that line were always wheezy and asthmatic; and the way they used to bark when leaving the station was something diabolical. Scientific persons have told me that this barking was due to some acoustic irregularity in the neighbourhood, but I didn't believe them, I never do. People of that description will always rather lie in Greek than tell the truth in English.

Arrived at their destination, our four friends strolled across the hideous bridge—the architect of which must

have had a spite against the place—to the hotel, to refresh after their journey and order lunch. This done, they wandered over to the Palace, and spent some time in abusing the exasperatingly symmetrical gardens.

There were very few people about, and the quartet soon voted it slow, and returned to the hotel, where, by way of making the most of the country air, they loafed away the time, playing four-handed billiards till lunch, the summons to which was hailed as a relief by all of them.

After lunch they again repaired to the billiard-room; and the Captain and Solomon knocked the balls about, while the other two indulged in a nap of a less expensive and more refreshing nature than that of the previous evening.

About four o'clock they made a start for Richmond in an outriggered gig, pulling randan, and arrived at Teddington Lock just as a small fleet of boats emerged from the gates on their way up the river.

One of these, a shabby-looking tub, containing a noisy party of 'Arries, got right across the bows of our friends' craft; and it was some little time before the awkward crew by whom she was manned could get their oars into the rowlocks and their boat's nose up the river. While they were splashing and backing and filling, Hayes and Caldecott treated them to a choice selection of riverside compliments, which elicited replies of an infinitely more graphic and less polite character.

Solomon, from his seat in the stern-sheets, could only obtain a partial view of the other boat, but he at once recognized the voice of one of its occupants as that of

his brother Barney. He pulled his coat-collar up to his ears, thrust his hat over his eyes, and leant forward so as to hide as much of his face as possible, and felt very considerably relieved when the other party passed them on their erratic course up the river. Barney had not recognized him, and that was something to be thankful for; but it was not pleasant to know that his brother was in such close proximity, and liable to run across him at the Richmond or Waterloo Station.

They arrived at the Castle without further adventure, and having left their boat in charge of a waterman, to be returned to Hampton Court, proceeded to while away the interval till dinner-time by watching the boats passing up and down the river from the comfortable seats at the end of the hotel garden.

Seven o'clock came, and with it the announcement of dinner, to which they sat down without waiting for the doctor, who, Captain Cormack said, had doubtless been detained in town too late to join them. Dinner passed off somewhat heavily, for Cormack appeared a little upset by the absence of the doctor. The two youngsters, however, had rowed themselves hungry, and were too busy plying their knives and forks to take much notice of the Captain or Solomon, who felt uneasy without knowing why. After sitting some time over their Burgundy, the party adjourned to the garden, and Cormack took Solomon's arm and led him down to the terrace overlooking the towing-path. They rested their elbows on the coping of the wall, and waited till the others, who had followed them, were out of earshot.

"I don't half like Bunton's absence," said the Cap-

tain; "he had a critical meeting to attend to-day, and said he should certainly wire if anything went wrong and prevented his coming. He hasn't come and he hasn't wired. I don't half like it, hanged if I do!"

"Hum!" said Solomon; "what was the meeting about?—not creditors?"

"Creditors! that's good," laughed Cormack. "As if either Bunton or I could play that game far enough to make it worth while! No, it's something much more troublesome than creditors. You see, there has been a big thing doing lately in the promotion of what certain credulous people believe to be tin mines in Cornwall, most of which are nothing but abandoned workings and old prospecting shafts. Well, Bunton saw the thing was good for a lump if it were carefully worked, and went down to Marazion, or some awful place with a name like that, and got the refusal of a property, upon which there are a lot of holes and burrows, for a song. He got hold of a Board of Directors by the usual process of tips and cheap champagne; picked up a fellow off a steamboat, who called himself a mining engineer, and got him to certify to the correctness of his description of the shafts, lodes, adits, stopes, and stumps, or sumps, or whatever they call them; and issued a flaming prospectus, asking the public to subscribe for five thousand one pound shares in the Blackstone Consolidated Tin Mines Company, Limited. He only wanted ten bob on application, and the cash came rolling in like an avalanche. Most of it was swallowed up in promotion money, engineer's fees, advertising, legal expenses, and so on; but we kept on issuing

favourable reports as to the progress made in erecting pumping and hauling machinery,—there isn't so much as a tea-kettle there, so far as I know, let alone a steam-engine of any kind,—and everything was going on swimmingly, and we should soon have been able to sell our scrip at a rattling good figure, when the directors got a requisition, signed by a lot of shareholders, calling upon them to convene a special meeting to explain certain matters not specified. That is the meeting Bunton had to attend to-day. I am afraid, and so is he, that the shareholders have got hold of some mining expert, as those technical idiots call themselves, and sent him down to report on the property, and what has been done there. If so, Bunton is done for. I don't think it will affect me seriously, because I can show that I've never been near the place, know nothing about it, in fact, and merely joined the syndicate to oblige the doctor. The books will prove that I took a hundred shares and paid for them, and that I bore my share of the preliminary expenses; which means that Bunton and I and the others divided the plunder, but I'll defy any one to prove that by the books. Bunton is as true as steel to his friends, and takes the whole risk himself; but I'm on tenter-hooks till I know how it has gone with him, and I think the best thing we can do is to get back to town at once; there's no knowing how bad the thing may be, and we can do no good either for Bunton or ourselves by staying here."

"I quite agree with you," said Solomon. "Let us get back by the next train; I can easily take those two young boobies off your hands if you want to get rid of them."

"I can't tell what I may have to do till I get to town and either see or hear from Bunton. If we don't find him at my diggings we are safe to get a message from him there. He's as cool as an iceberg when anything goes wrong, the end of the world wouldn't flurry him."

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXPLOSION

THE doctor walked into Cormack's drawing-room about four o'clock on the afternoon of the Hampton Court excursion, looking somewhat jaded and a little paler than usual, and threw himself into an easy-chair, after telling Jane to bring a pint of champagne and some ice and seltzer-water.

The meeting had lasted from eleven o'clock until past one, and the result had been even more unpleasant than Bunton and the Captain had anticipated. An engineer from the Government School of Mines, who dragged half the alphabet after his name, and whose opinion was worth more, or at any rate cost his clients more, than that of a fashionable lawyer, had been down at the request of certain malcontent shareholders and inspected the property of the Blackstone Consolidated Company.

His report, which was read at the meeting, was short but pointed. He had examined the so-called workings, he said, and found that they consisted of a couple of old shafts, or wells; it was impossible to say which, for they had evidently been unused for a very long time, and were so choked and overgrown that it was not easy to

find them. He had failed to discover any indications of tin on the property, nor could he see anything of the quantities of ore referred to in the prospectus as already on the surface awaiting transport to the smelting furnaces. There was no mining machinery nor other machinery on the place, so far as he could discover, with the exception of an old hand-pump, the plunger of which was rusted fast in the barrel. There were no miners' cottages, as stated in the prospectus, nor was he able to see anything of the chapel, schoolroom, manager's house and offices mentioned in that document. The property was fifteen miles from the railway, instead of being connected with it by a siding a few hundred yards long, as the promoters had stated.

The engineer concluded by stating that the only person living on the estate was an old peasant, who answered to the name of Poltrenick, inhabiting a sort of wigwam, with a hole in the top for a chimney, and another in the side for door and window, and who existed on the precarious produce of half an acre of garden, the cultivation of which had been his sole occupation for years past. This patriarch of the soil could not remember any mining operations on the estate, and appeared to fancy that tin ore was something of the nature of a vegetable. In fact, the writer said, it was clear that the shareholders had been most shamefully victimized. That was the gist of his report.

About fifty shareholders were present at the meeting, which was presided over by an irascible little publican, who had taken a leading part in bringing the directors to book. Most of the shareholders were small shop-

keepers, clerks, and shop-assistants, meek and easily bullied people, who would never have dared to ask a question if left to themselves. But under the leadership of their present chairman, who had got up the agitation mainly with an eye to business, his establishment being naturally chosen as the meeting-place of the malcontents, they became quite truculent, and scowled at Doctor Bunton, and his two brother directors, and the secretary in a manner which terrified all but our medical friend, who sat with his hands clasped over his knee, smiling sweetly throughout the reading of the report and the various uncomplimentary comments it elicited.

The chairman having concluded his remarks somewhat abruptly, for he was out of breath and in a furious temper, which was not improved by Bunton's continual smiles, the doctor intimated politely that he wished to consult his colleagues in private before he said anything in reply to the tirade of abuse which had just been hurled at them by a person who evidently had either taken leave of his senses, or was completely ignorant of what he was saying.

This caused the wrathful licensed victualler to lose his temper still more, and he screamed out a volley of abuse, amongst which swindlers, rogues, and thieves were the mildest epithets. This was exactly what Bunton wanted.

"Gentlemen, you hear that. I will ask you to remember that the person in the chair has addressed myself, my brother directors, and the secretary of the Company as rogues, thieves, swindlers, and blacklegs, and has further applied epithets to us which are far too gross for me to repeat. We came here, in reply to your

request, for the purpose of answering certain questions upon which we understand you desire information ; and I may say that, in spite of the so-called report which has just been read, and the outrageous remarks of your chairman, whose presence in that chair is an insult both to the Board and to your own common sense, we are ready to meet you and to offer what will I am sure be accepted as a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the present position of the Company, and of our conduct as directors since its formation. But, gentlemen, we owe ourselves some little respect. It is impossible for us as directors to remain present at a meeting of which that person acts as chairman. We shall at once take steps to make him understand that he cannot with impunity accuse his fellow-men of such misdemeanours as he has imputed to us to-day. The books will show in what manner the funds of the Company have been applied ; the property is open to inspection at any time. The so-called report which has been presented to you to-day can only be accounted for on the supposition that its author, by some extraordinary accident, has inspected and reported upon an estate with which this Company has nothing whatever to do. As I said before, it is impossible for myself and my brother directors to attempt to offer anything like a detailed explanation to this meeting after the gross manner in which we have been insulted by your chairman, who appears to have acted with your approval." The speaker was here interrupted by cries of "No, no," "went too far," "abuse quite uncalled for," and so on. "Thank you, gentlemen," continued the acute doctor, who at once saw that the

tables were for the time being turned in his favour, "I am glad for your own sakes that you are not unanimously of the opinions so graphically expressed by the person whom you have placed in the chair, because on another occasion we shall be able to meet you as gentlemen should meet, and place matters before you in a clear and succinct manner. If we then fail to convince you that our efforts have been consistently directed to the furtherance of your interests, we shall be only too happy to retire from office and leave you to appoint our successors." The doctor resumed his seat amidst ill-suppressed murmurs of satisfaction.

The little publican was rather confused by the turn which had been given to events by his own unreasoning violence ; but he was not a man to be easily silenced, and, though no match for Bunton in cunning and readiness of tongue, he to a certain extent saw through the tactics of his opponent, and determined to circumvent him if possible.

But the doctor had made up his mind as to his course of action, and no sooner had the chairman gained his legs, than he and his party rose and moved towards the door.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, don't allow them to sneak off like that ; I—"

The doctor faced round and surveyed the speaker contemptuously for a moment or two, then he turned to the meeting, and said, "Gentlemen, it is, as you must know, quite impossible for us to remain in the same room with the person who has just spoken ; but so far from desiring to 'sneak out of it,' as he expresses it, I

may inform you that we are about to visit my solicitor in order to instruct him to take steps for the punishment of the infamous slander—”

“I’ll apologize; hear me apologize, gentlemen,” stut-tered the chairman excitedly. “I didn’t mean—at least I wasn’t thinking what I was saying, and—”

“Gentlemen, it must be understood that we have been grossly libelled in our public capacity as directors of this Company, and it is therefore quite out of our power to accept an apology of any kind. Men who hold important trusts cannot allow their official reputations to be blasted by the thoughtless—though in this case it was anything but thoughtless—abuse of the first hot-headed, ignorant shareholder who happens to fancy that he knows more of the Company’s affairs than those in whose hands their management is reposed. There is nothing more that I need say, I think,” continued the doctor musingly, “except that a special meeting shall be called as soon as the books can be examined, and that two of the directors will visit the mines in the course of the next few days, taking with them such shareholders as may wish to have ocular demonstration of the value of the Company’s property. If there be anything more that we can do to strengthen your confidence in the Company’s position and in our own trustworthiness, you have only to name it, and if it be in our power we will meet your wishes most willingly.”

The applause which followed this speech of the doctor’s was thoroughly genuine, and had the effect of enraging the chairman more than ever.

“All mighty fine, nothing but blarney all the same.

I'm not going to be taken in by such damned transparent humbug as that, if you are," and he glared at the meeting furiously. "Bring your action for slander, bring a dozen, bring a million if you like," he roared at Bunton. "I said you were a pack of swindlers, liars, thieves, and pick-pockets; well, I'll repeat it, and I'll prove it, that's more. I'll go down to Cornwall this very night, if there's any means of getting there."

"Certainly there are," interrupted a bald-headed shareholder on his right; "the nine o'clock express will take you right through to Penzance."

"Well, then, I'll go down by the nine o'clock express to this devil of a Blackstone Consolidated humbug's estate, and see for myself what the truth is. You can't frighten me with your actions for slander, and you can't make me swallow just as much gammon and soft-sawder as you please. You may have me up for slander and welcome; take care I don't have you up for fraud," and he fell back in his chair fuming.

The doctor and his companions bowed to the meeting and passed out of the room as the chairman's explosion concluded.

As soon as they were in the street, the two other directors, who, as I said before, were mere dummies, lending their names for a consideration, in the first instance as promoters, and who were afterwards adroitly put in as directors by the doctor and his associates in the enterprise, began to bewail the course things had taken, and one of them went so far as to assert, that had he known what was coming he would never have lent his name to the scheme.

“Look here, my dear sir,” said the doctor, stopping short in his walk and facing the speaker, “you were well paid for the use of your name, and you run no risk whatever, if you will be wise enough to keep your mouth shut, and only remember that you are a large shareholder, and stand to lose more heavily than any of the grumblers we have just left. It will be your own fault if you let all the world know that your shares cost you nothing. However, this is no place to discuss our position. Suppose you lunch with me; we shall be alone, and better able to take a reasonable view of the matter than we can with all the world gaping at us in the street.”

The result of their conference over their knives and forks was a resolve on the part of his two colleagues to trust everything to Doctor Bunton, who promised that he would get them out of the difficulty if they would follow his advice, and say nothing to any one about the Company's affairs till they heard from him, which he assured them they should do as soon as ever he had concerted his plans.

The doctor then proceeded to his own lodgings, where he locked himself into his sitting-room, and spent some time in sorting and destroying papers. When he had gone through the contents of a large bureau, selecting a small package of documents, which he placed in a pocket-book, and carefully burning the remainder, he went into his bed-room and packed a small portmanteau, then locked the doors of both rooms, carried his portmanteau downstairs, and sent for a cab, which put him down a few minutes later at Captain Cormack's abode.

He took a cigar, and sipped the champagne and seltzer, which Jane brought him, slowly and thoughtfully.

Once he put the hot end of his cigar into his mouth in his abstraction of mind, and sputtered out what sounded remarkably like a most blasphemous oath with the burning ashes. He had not forgotten his promise to telegraph the result of the meeting to the Captain, but it had turned out so much more seriously than he had anticipated, that he hesitated to wire the truth. No, he would wait till Cormack returned, and then they must decide upon some immediate course of action, unless they meant to be caught like moles in a trap.

The doctor thought until his head began to reel, but he had to admit to himself that it was useless for him to try to put a bold face on the affairs of the tin company. In a few hours the shareholders would probably be informed by the chairman of the late meeting of the actual state of the case; and then, well, there would be nothing for it but flight and rustication abroad until the fuss was over.

After all, he and his partners had no cause to grumble at the financial results of their tin mining enterprise, whatever the shareholders might have; and there was clearly nothing more to be made out of it as things had turned out; and he would have at least twenty-four hours before the inquisitive little publican could possibly enlighten the shareholders as to the real state of affairs, even if he succeeded in discovering the Company's property, which was by no means a certainty.

The doctor took a Bradshaw from the bookshelf over the mantelpiece, and turning up the Great Western,

began tracing the journey of the nine o'clock West of England express, the train by which the self-elected commission of inquiry of one had announced his intention of travelling.

Not expecting his friends to return till ten at the earliest, he dropped into the 'Gaiety,' and amused himself most agreeably for an hour or so, dividing his attention between the foolery of the burlesque and the languid airs and graces of the limp, lank-haired fops around him in the stalls. The doctor was an athletic, well-set-up fellow, in spite of his small stature, and he had the bronzed complexion, square chin, and bright eye that indicate pluck, quickness in action, and self-reliance. He studied the pasty-faced, weak-kneed, narrow-chested, blear-eyed, hollow-cheeked weeds, that lolled and sprawled on the velvet cushions, leering impotently at the sparsely-clad actresses, and occasionally giving vent to their weary admiration in languidly obscene remarks, at which they were, however, too tired to laugh.

"Faugh! what a filthy set of washed-out human dish-rags!" he soliloquized; "there isn't a man in the whole crowd, that I can see, with the physique of a Hottentot. Small wonder either, considering the way they live. Cigarettes and brandy-and-soda for breakfast at noon; devilled bones and more brandy-and-soda for lunch; a nap afterwards; then a crawl on a park-hack; more brandy-and-soda and cigarettes all the time; dinner, with too much bad wine, and little or nothing eaten—how can they expect to have any appetite?—more brandy and cigarettes afterwards; sit

stewing in here till nearly midnight ; cayenne pepper, brandy, and cigarettes for supper, or poisonous champagne at some demirep's ; and cards, billiards, scandal, and more brandy-and-soda and cigarettes till daybreak. Gad, what a life for an intelligent being to lead ! But are these flaccid-fleshed anatomies intelligent beings ? By Jove, they look more like vegetables, something soft and sappy, like a sodden turnip reared alongside a horsepond. I can't stand their perfumed handkerchiefs and pomade any longer, they infect the atmosphere. I'm off !" And the active little man scandalized the whole of the stalls by jumping up and forcing his way along the row of black-cased legs to the exit, while a young woman, attired in what looked like a Trouville bathing costume, and a wet one at that, was singing a silly song with a break-down at the end of each verse, which secured her more flattery and presents from the vapid young men in the stalls than the finest classical actress in the world could have won from them.

At the door of the Captain's abode he ran up against his four friends. "Aha, there you are ! I was wondering what time you would turn up. Very sorry I couldn't join you, but it was impossible for me to get away," said the doctor, as they were mounting the stairs.

"Why didn't you wire?" whispered Cormack, falling back so as to be on a level with Bunton.

"It would have done no good. I must have a talk with you at once. Things are about as bad as they can be. We, or at any rate I, shall have to clear at once."

"Confound it, it's as bad as that, eh?" said the Captain, as they entered the sitting-room. He called Solomon, and explaining that he must talk over the events of the day at once with Bunton, left him to entertain the two youngsters for a while, he and his worthy partner retiring to the dressing-room. Solomon, who was now on terms of perfect intimacy with those promising young gentlemen, was soon engaged in a hopeless endeavour to make them comprehend the mysteries of solo whist, which he assured them was the most interesting game in the world when you thoroughly understood it, which there seemed to be very little danger of their ever doing.

We will leave them to their innocent amusement, and see what the Captain and his ally were doing.

Rapidly, but clearly, Bunton detailed the events of the day, the recital of which merely elicited an occasional exclamation of temper or surprise from Cormack. When he had finished the doctor looked up inquiringly from the easy-chair into which he had thrown himself.

Cormack, who was standing in front of the fireplace, his hands thrust into his pockets, disengaged his left hand, and began stroking his thick beard meditatively. At last he looked up. "I'm afraid you're euchred this time, Dick. If that wretched little beer-shop-keeper does go down to-night, he can hardly fail to discover the truth; and you see there's been so much of this Company business done lately, that Government would jump at the chance of a prosecution. By the way, who is this refractory publican? Do you know him?"

Perhaps there may be a chance of buying him off. What do you think?"

"His name is Sampson, and he keeps a public-house in one of the streets out of Aldgate. I believe he got up this agitation primarily in order to bring custom to his house, for it seems the malcontents have held a lot of meetings there; but he's a regular little spit-fire, and as obstinate as a mule. No, it would be quite useless to attempt to bribe him to keep quiet; he has raised such an excitement amongst the others, that I don't think he could lull them into confidence again if he tried, though it seemed to me that I managed to make a favourable impression more than once to-day. You see, he overdid his part. However, in any case the mischief is done, and it matters very little whether Mr. Sampson or any other shareholder takes up the investigation now. I only hope that nine o'clock train may go off the rails, or come to grief somehow, and involve Mr. Sampson in the smash. But now, what am I to do?"

"Well, it amounts to this," said Cormack, slowly. "If you remain here, I am afraid it will go hardly with you; possibly with all of us. If you go, they will say you have bolted, that you are principally, if not alone, to blame; and as the books will prove nothing against us, they will make you the scapegoat, and we shall appear in the light of your victims also. Yes, I think it will be wiser for you to take a new departure, Dick, as soon as you can get your things together. How many hours do you reckon you have clear before that inquisitive little beer-engine can put the wire in motion?"

"Well, he can't possibly arrive at his destination

before to-morrow evening ; and as there's no telegraph office within fifteen miles, he can hardly send a message till next morning. Besides, he's an ignorant fellow, and is tolerably certain to leave without making any arrangements as to what is to be done in the event of his finding that the mine only exists on our prospectus, and the machinery, buildings, and staff are not to be found outside our monthly reports. They can't take proceedings on a telegraphic message, in a case of this kind, either ; Boniface will have to come back to town and swear all sorts of affidavits, before my liberty can be in any peril. I think I may call myself safe for the next four days ; for the next three, at any rate. Plenty of time to put a safe stretch of blue water between myself and inquisitive friends. I've destroyed all papers of any importance which might get you or the others into trouble, locked up my rooms, and brought my bag here, so that I am ready for a start at once. But I can't make up my mind where to go. I don't care about crossing the Big Drink so soon after that little *exposé* in New York last autumn ; and besides, in a case like this, it is quite on the cards that I might be hauled back by the cable. I dare say I should be safe enough in any of the little out-of-the-way Spanish or Italian seaports ; but I hate the natives and their garlic, and I should be utterly at a loss for occupation and companionship. No, I've been turning the thing over and over in my mind, and I have half determined upon something bolder in the way of banishment. You've noticed what a fuss the papers have been making lately about these diamond fields at the Cape? Well, I

believe I should find ample opportunity there of making the most of my talents. That public nuisance, the cable, does not touch South Africa anywhere as yet; and, from what I have heard of them, I fancy the Diamond Fields are just the kind of Arcadia where a gentleman, whose antecedents have been unfortunate, may settle down without fear of any unpleasant recurrence to them on the part of his neighbours. Just the place for me, in fact; but I hardly care to undertake so long a journey alone. I don't think it would be politic for you to leave just yet; there are a good many matters to wind up, and when once I am out of the way, you will be in no danger. What do you think of that young Davis? He strikes me as being a very sharp youngster; I've half a mind to offer to take him with me."

Cormack thought for some minutes before he replied: "I should like to have gone with you myself; but, as you say, there are a lot of odds and ends, with more or less profit attached, to be cleared up before I can leave—before I ought to leave, anyhow. About young Davis: I have seen more of him than you have. He's smart, useful, and reliable, of that I am certain; and I think he would jump at the chance of going with you. Shall I call him in, and you can put it to him? I must really go and look after our young aristocrats for a minute or two."

Solomon entered the snuggerly a few minutes after the Captain's exit, and the doctor put him in possession of as much of the facts of the case as he considered it necessary for him to know, concluding by stating his

intention of taking a run out to the Diamond Fields, provided he could secure a suitable companion.

"I've heard a good deal about these diamond diggings," said Solomon. "A cousin of mine went out there about a year and a half ago, and has done uncommonly well. He writes that there's lots of money to be made there, and made easily. He's a sharp fellow, but not fond of work; Jews never are; and I am sure he would never make money digging for diamonds or anything else. I don't think digging would be much in your line either, doctor; but if my cousin Hyam could make money there, you could hardly fail to do so. I've half a mind to try my luck there myself."

"That is exactly what I was about to suggest," said the other. "You have your wits about you, and could be exceedingly useful to me in many ways. You are a young man, and there are far better chances for such as you in a new country than in this humdrum hole, where speculation is overdone, and big capitalists are the only privileged thieves. I suppose you have no family ties, or other special reasons for wishing to remain in England?"

Thus questioned, Solomon informed Bunton, in a few words, of his present position and lack of prospects. He had by this time come to regard Barney as an incubus, and his description of his brother to the doctor was by no means couched in flattering terms.

"Well, then, we'll consider it arranged. Shake hands on it," said the doctor, suiting his action to his words. "We can start at once. This is Thursday, and the steamer leaves Southampton to-morrow at four o'clock. How soon can you be ready?"

"In half-an-hour," replied Solomon ; "I have only to run round to Hatchet's and get my bag and what remains of the cash the Captain and I won last night."

"By the way, as regards funds," said Bunton, "I shall constitute myself cashier for both. I have plenty. We shall want some things for the voyage, but we can lay them in at Southampton to-morrow morning. So please look upon what you have as pocket-money. You will be able to pick up something at cards on the voyage."

They returned to the drawing-room, and Bunton explained to his young friends that he and Mr. Davis were to start on a business journey of some duration on the morrow, and laughingly asked them to have compassion on the Captain in his solitude, which Hayes willingly promised, saying that they would be very loth to lose so pleasant an acquaintance. The party broke up very late, or rather early ; Hayes and Caldecott returned to Bayswater in a chance hansom, and the other three were accommodated for the night, or what remained of it, in Cormack's quarters.

CHAPTER V.

AFLOAT

SOLOMON woke early, and finding himself rather cramped for space on the sofa on which he had spent the night, he jumped up and dressed, without disturbing the Captain and Bunton, whose regular breathing, audible outside the door of the bedroom, convinced him that both were still asleep, as he would probably have been himself had his bed been more comfortable.

He went down into the street, and sauntering into the Strand, bought a *Standard* from the first newsboy he encountered, and turned up the shipping advertisements on the front page. He soon found what he was looking for. Under the heading, Cape, Natal, and South-East African Ports, the Union Steamship Company's Royal Mail Steamer *Gaul*, 3500 tons, 3000 horse-power, Captain Chesstree, Royal Naval Reserve, was advertised to leave Southampton docks at four o'clock that afternoon for Capetown, Algoa Bay, East London, Natal, &c., *via* Madeira and St. Helena.

Solomon's ideas of geography were vague. He knew the Cape was somewhere down South, across the line; that the climate was warm compared to that of England;

that the majority of the inhabitants were niggers, with whom the whites were frequently involved in trouble ; and that a good deal of money was being made by the latter out of diamonds, ostrich feathers, and other products of the country. It made little difference to a person of his cosmopolitan tendencies whether he pitched his tent in South Africa or South Lambeth, provided he saw his way to accumulate money ; indeed, now that he had determined to try to rise superior to his old mode of making an existence, and to shake himself clear of his brother Barney and old associates generally, he was inclined to be rather pleased than otherwise that the spot chosen by the doctor for their exile was at such a distance from his native land.

He extended his walk to Hatchet's, settled for the room he had not occupied, drew his deposit from the manager, explaining that he was unexpectedly called into the country for a few days by business, and promising to telegraph for rooms as soon as his work was completed, and arrived with his bag at the Captain's just as that gentleman and the doctor were growing seriously uneasy as to what had become of him.

"Good morning," said Solmon, shaking hands cordially with them ; "I've been up this hour and more. You were both asleep ; I heard you snoring through the bedroom door, so I didn't disturb you, but went out and got a paper, and then on to Hatchet's and fetched my things. I suppose you thought I'd given you the slip, eh ?"

"Never mind what we thought," said the Captain. "You see we haven't known you very long, and one's

thoughts are not always under control to such an extent that we can drive them into any particular groove. I dare say you would have felt a little doubtful yourself under the same circumstances. However, here you are, and breakfast is waiting. You have not too much time to waste to-day."

"No, I see the steamer sails at four o'clock," said Solomon. "I say, doctor, how long does the voyage usually take?"

"I think about twenty-two or twenty-three days is the average. Last time I came home from the Cape was in a sailing ship, and we were sixty-two days doing it. But then we were about a week drifting about in the Doldrums ; so that, so far as actual sailing time was concerned, we made an excellent passage. That was twenty-five years ago, when I was a youngster," the doctor continued. "The steamers in those days were miserable tubs, and many people returning from India, as I was doing, preferred the comfortable old-fashioned East India sailing ships to the rickety, evil-smelling paddle-boats, that were always coming to grief, and travelled very little faster than sailers. Now, of course, every one travels by steamer, and I believe the Cape boats are very decent sort of ships. Once through the Bay, there is seldom any rough weather till near the end of the voyage ; and more often than not it is a regular yachting trip. What sort of sailor are you ?"

"So far as I know," replied Solomon, "I'm like the Captain of the *Pinafore* ; but then my experience of the sea has not been very extensive."

"You don't look particularly bilious," said Cormack ;

"it's people with bilious temperaments, isn't it, Bunton, that suffer most?"

"Well, I'm not very clear as to that," answered Bunton; "I'm bilious enough, in all conscience, yet I don't know what *mal-de-mer* means. Nerves have a good deal to do with it. But if you've finished breakfast, let's have a look at Bradshaw, and settle what train to go down by. And one of us must go to Leadenhall Street and book the passages. It will look better to take them at the London office."

Bradshaw was investigated, and a train leaving at half-past eleven agreed upon. It was arranged that the Captain should proceed to the Union Company's City office and secure a double-berthed first-class cabin in the *Gaul*, the doctor impressing upon him the advisability of getting a deck-cabin, and if that luxury were not attainable, he was to be careful to take one at the forward end of the saloon, but not too close to the pantry and serving-room, and away from the after winch. Cormack departed on his errand, and Solomon and the doctor set to work to prepare a list of articles needful for the voyage.

"I believe in flying light," said the doctor; "washing is a horrid nuisance aboard ship, and I always go in for paper collars and flannel shirts. We must lay in a stock of these; and we shall want deck shoes, a couple of blue serge suits, straw hats and puggarees, and I think that's about all that is absolutely necessary. I've plenty of rugs and wraps for both. By the way, have you a good mackintosh?"

Solomon confessed that the whole of his wardrobe

consisted of what he was wearing, and the contents of the bag he had brought that morning from Hatchet's.

"Ah, I thought as much," said Bunton. "However, there's no disgrace in that. I've been lower down on my luck than that often. Suppose we run round to Glenney's and make up deficiencies. We shall have time to do so before Cormack gets back."

In less than an hour the pair returned, Solomon equipped with a portmanteau containing everything necessary to enable him to make a respectable appearance during the voyage and on landing, and the doctor provided with what he considered requisite to complete his own wardrobe. Bunton selected a capacious portmanteau of Cormack's, in which he deposited his purchases, looked out a couple of warm railway rugs and one of the Captain's waterproof coats, which fitted Solomon rather loosely, but still well enough for ordinary purposes, and took down a Winchester rifle, which he carefully inspected before he returned it to its case, and then, with Solomon's assistance, carried the whole of their joint *impedimenta* down to the hall.

"I always take this little gun with me," he said, tapping the rifle-case with his foot. "I'm used to it, and it has got me out of one or two tight places in its time. By the way, you may as well take a revolver ; you can have a rifle also, if you like, but I don't suppose it would be much use to you."

"Never fired anything more deadly than a pea-shooter in my life," replied Solomon, "and I'm as frightened of fire-arms as I am of small-pox. But I suppose it's correct to carry a weapon of some sort on the diamond

diggings, and so long as I don't keep it loaded it can't do either of us much damage."

They returned to the snuggery, and the doctor, after examining quite an extensive battery of pistols, selected a pretty little plain, black-finished, 380 bore Colt, and after snapping it round once or twice, handed it to Solomon, saying, "That's about the best of the bunch. It belonged once to a man I knew in Arizona, who could never be made to understand that there ought not to be more than four knaves in a pack of cards. It was this unfortunate misconception on his part that brought him to his death and left me this,"—and he pointed to a round scar under his right ear,—“and his pistol to remember him by. You will never learn to shoot as straight with it as he did, but we'll have some practice at bottles going out, and I dare say you'll be able to hit a haystack by the time we get to Capetown."

Solomon slipped the revolver into his trouser pocket, but finding it rather conspicuous there, transferred it to the breast-pocket of his coat.

"That won't do," said Bunton; "you must get hip-pockets put into those continuations of yours when we get on board; I always order them both sides. Look here," and he showed two capacious pockets with buttoned flaps under his jacket.

They had a last look round the room to see if there were anything more they might find useful, and Bunton selected a silver flask and a hunting knife. "Cormack ought to be back by this," said he, looking at his watch; "suppose we adjourn to the dining-room, and take a revive after all this packing."

The Captain's cab pulled up at the door while the libation to Bacchus was performing, and that *ci-devant* warrior entered the room, looking very warm, in time to add his quota to the ceremony.

"Well, here you are, Dick," said he, pulling out a couple of printed forms. "I managed to get you a deck cabin, had to pay a fiver extra, but it will be well worth it in the tropics. Are you all packed and ready? The office was full of people, and I'm later than I thought I should be."

"We haven't too much time to spare," said Bunton, putting the passage tickets into his pocket-book; "we can take the whole of our baggage in the cabin, so that there will be no necessity to have our effects decorated with our names and addresses. By the way, Cormack, how did you book us?"

"As Mr. Davis and friend," replied the Captain. "I took your passages through to Algoa Bay, because the people at the office said that was the shorter route to the Fields. They pointed it all out to me on a map, but I've forgotten all about it, except that you will land at a place called Port Elizabeth, unless you prefer to get off at Capetown, and do part of your journey inland by train and the balance by coach. I don't envy you the latter if the roads in Cape Colony are no better than those in the Western States."

"I've very little doubt they're a great deal worse," said Bunton, "but I dare say we shall survive them. But there's the cab. Come along, Davis, it's about time I dropped the Mister, I think."

A drive of a few minutes landed the trio at Waterloo

Station, and they were soon comfortably stowed in a first-class smoking compartment with a plentiful supply of papers and periodicals, which, in spite of the doctor's protest, the Captain persisted in purchasing, saying they would be glad of them on the voyage.

On arriving at Southampton, Solomon was for going down to the docks at once to have a look at their ship, but the doctor interposed: "No, no, we won't go on board till the last moment, the ship will be all topsyturvy, and we have no heavy luggage to look after, nor anything to trouble us. We'll have our lunch comfortably at the South-Western, and stroll down to the docks so as to get on board just as they are ready to cast off."

The doctor's programme was carried out, and the party, having sent on their luggage by one of the hotel porters, walked down to the docks and boarded the steamer a few minutes after the hour at which she was billed to start.

As Bunton had predicted, confusion worse confounded reigned everywhere on deck, which was covered with coal-dust and mud—which appears to be perennial in Southampton dockyard—littered with baggage of all kinds, and crowded with people, hustling, swearing, and perspiring, and shouting themselves hoarse in the vain endeavour to make their voices heard above the roar of the steam from the scape-pipe. The Captain forced a passage for his party, by means of a judicious wriggling movement of his broad shoulders, to where the chief steward was standing at the after-companion, Solomon and the doctor following him and keeping an eye on the porter, who made his way after them as well as he

could, upsetting people at every other step with his load of portmanteaus, and begging pardon indiscriminately all the time.

"Good day, steward," said Cormack; "can you tell me whereabouts this cabin is?" handing him the passage tickets, which he took from Bunton.

"Port side forward, sir, under the bridge, just opposite the smoke-room," replied that functionary, touching his cap. "I'll send one of my men with you—"

"Never mind that," said Cormack; "you're busy, I can find it easy enough," and he faced round, and the party made their way with difficulty along the port alley-way till abreast of the smoking-room. "Here we are, No. 76 and 77," said Cormack, opening the door on his left. "Devilish comfortable quarters, and the best position in the ship. Here, porter, bear a hand with the luggage."

The cabin was provided with the two berths placed athwartships, and a sort of sofa under the port-hole, which was a large square opening big enough to swallow half a gale of wind; altogether a great improvement on the little stuffy dens to which travellers are usually condemned. The portmanteaus were stowed beneath the sofa, the bags under the lower berth, the rifle slung to one of the iron deck-beams overhead, and the rugs, mackintoshes, and smaller articles disposed in various nooks and corners; all which being effected, Cormack surveyed the arrangements critically, while he payed and dismissed the porter, and remarked that nothing could by any possibility be more snug, an observation to which Solomon and Bunton cordially assented.

"Now, Dick, my boy," said the Captain, taking

Bunton by the hand affectionately, "you and I have often parted before this, but we always gravitate together again, and we shall do the same this time. I don't like last words any more than you do, and when men know each other as well as we do they're out of place. Good-bye and good luck, my friend. I shall write to you at the Post Office, Capetown, till you send me another address. As regards cash, you know the old arrangement will always hold good so long as I'm above-ground, but I hope to join you before long if that meddling little publican doesn't put an embargo on me, and you will be able to hold out for some time as you are, even if nothing should turn up. Shake hands, Davis, my boy: I wish you all manner of success; stick to Dick here and you'll do. And now there's the whistle blowing; let us go and shed a parting tear before I go ashore."

The whistle was screeching, the bell clanging, children screaming, women crying, men swearing, and steam roaring and hissing as our friends made their way aft to the companion and down into the saloon. In the saloon everything was confusion, baggage lay about on the deck, the table and seats were covered with wraps, bags, and lumber of all kinds, and people were shaking hands, kissing, crying, laughing, and tumbling over each other in all directions.

"Oh, goodness, what a pickle!" ejaculated Solomon. "Surely we're not going to carry all that menagerie?"

"Not a fourth part of them, sir," said the steward, who came up as he spoke; "we've only thirty-two saloon passengers, and we're certified for one hundred and fifty."

"Just the man we wanted," said the Captain. "Steward, show us the doctor's shop."

"Bar, sir? Closed by Company's orders in port. If you require anything, just step into my cabin, and I'll see what I can do for you," and he winked reassuringly.

A couple of bottles of Pommery having been absorbed in the steward's sanctum, Cormack recommended his two friends to the special consideration of that important functionary, and they gained the deck as the gangway was on the point of being hauled ashore. The Captain shook hands again hastily, and got ashore just as the gangway was slung in at his heels. Bunton and Solomon finding themselves in constant danger of being knocked over by the sailors, or sent flying by a rope's end, where they were standing on the quarter-deck, made their way aft to the taffrail, and thence waved a final adieu to Cormack as the ship forged slowly past the dock-heads.

Gradually the decks began to look more ship-shape as the baggage was removed, ropes coiled up, and the coal-dust swept into the scuppers; and by the time the dressing-bell rang, both the saloon and quarter-deck had assumed pretty nearly their customary neat appearance. Dinner, as is always the case the first day at sea, was not a particularly comfortable meal. The Captain and chief officer did not come down, and the honours of the table were rather feebly done by the ship's doctor, a consumptive-looking youth of about three-and-twenty, who sported an eye-glass, and wore his hair fringed over his forehead like a barmaid; and by the chief engineer, who looked as if he fancied his hands were dirty, and spoke to no one but the waiters during dinner.

The evening passed somewhat dismally for Solomon, who found it almost impossible to preserve his equilibrium in any posture, for there was a nasty cross sea on, which made the vessel dance about in a very inconvenient manner to people who had been used all their lives to *terra firma*. About nine o'clock Bunton, who had been making the acquaintance of the skipper in his cabin on the quarter-deck, came down into the saloon, where he found Solomon pretending to read a magazine, and trying very hard not to slip about on his seat as the ship rolled and pitched.

"Well, my lad, and how do you feel?" asked the doctor, who was as steady on his pins as an old salt; "you look a little white about the gills."

"I suppose I shall get used to the rocking after a bit," replied Solomon; "it won't go on like this all the time, will it?"

"Bless you, no; as soon as we get through the Bay we shall probably find smooth water, and more likely than not, carry it with us all the way to Table Bay. But do you feel at all qualmish?"

"A little. Oh, dash it, there she goes again!" as the ship lurched to starboard, and Solomon had to jam his knees hard up under the table to avoid performing a backward somersault. "It is rather trying to have one's stomach knocked about like this; I begin to believe that I shall be horribly ill presently."

"Come along and turn in then, and I'll mix you something that will settle your internal economy and send you to sleep. You'll be all right in the morning."

The doctor gave Solomon his arm and piloted him safely to their cabin, pulled his boots off, and soon had him comfortably tucked into the lower bunk. He then took a small medicine-chest from his portmanteau, from which he produced a glass measure and several vials, from the contents of which he prepared a draught, and made Solomon take it. "Now you ought to be asleep in ten minutes," said he. "I won't disturb you when I turn in, but if you should wake and feel queer, don't scruple to rouse me. I don't think you will, and so will say good night. I'm going to have a cigar on deck and a chat with the Captain."

When the doctor re-entered the cabin a couple of hours later, he found his companion sleeping as peacefully as an infant with a full cargo of soothing syrup, in spite of the fact that the wind and sea had increased so much that sounds of suffering were audible from several of the state-rooms on the saloon-deck, and the good ship was ducking her nose into the green seas, and scooping them up as if conscious that her decks wanted washing. Bunton put himself into his pyjamas, and then slung himself up dexterously into the top bunk, pulling up the weather-board, and wedging himself in as well as he could with a rug, and in five minutes was sleeping the sleep of the just, or something that suited him just as well as that enviable description of slumber.

Both woke early the following morning, and Solomon, in reply to the doctor's kindly inquiry after his state of health, declared that he felt as fit as a fiddle.

"Jump up then, and let's take advantage of the bath-rooms before the folk in the saloon are astir; and then

you can don your sea-rig, and we'll have a trot on deck to pick up an appetite for breakfast, and get your sea-legs into working order."

There was still a good deal of motion, but the sea was longer and less choppy, and the ship was not quite so unpleasantly lively as the previous evening. Half-an-hour's brisk walking up and down the quarter-deck very much improved Solomon's power of keeping his equilibrium, and made him so hungry that his performance at breakfast fairly astonished the doctor, and elicited the Captain's approval.

Only a dozen or so of the other passengers put in an appearance at breakfast. Bunton sat on the Captain's right, with Solomon next him, the place of honour on his left being occupied by a handsome but vulgar-looking middle-aged lady, whose handsomer over-dressed daughter was Solomon's *vis-à-vis*. Captain Chesstree introduced our friends to these ladies, Mrs. and Miss Blowser, who had made several voyages with him to and from Port Elizabeth, where the male Blowser kept a big grocer's shop and called himself a merchant.

Further down the table sat three solemn-looking gentlemen in long black coats and white chokers, who were going out to spread salvation, soap, and fallacious ideas of the equality of black and white amongst the unsophisticated natives of South Africa—a class of settlers not regarded with much affection by the majority of colonists, who know by experience that a nigger usually comes out of the missionary mill very much the worse for the process.

"I see the Church is well represented," said Bunton

to the Captain, glancing as he spoke towards the sable-clad trio.

"Ay, and there are three more of 'em laid up in their cabins. I don't care about having so many sky-pilots on board. They always quarrel about which is to conduct service; and if they see a game at nap or loo going on, or catch scent of a flirtation, they're the first to report to the directors and try to make mischief. I had a brace of them last voyage, and they squabbled all the way, and gave me more trouble than all the sour old maids and frisky young ones I ever carried. But this is the first time the old *Gaul* has registered six parson-power. They come out for second-class fare too, and I wish the people at the office would put them in the fore-cabin. I expect we shall have a breeze with them on Sunday about Church-services, but I shall just read the sea allowance myself, and leave them to organize as many independent functions as they please. I suppose you have been at the Cape before?"

"Yes, some years ago I stayed a few days at Capetown, on my way home from Calcutta," replied the doctor. "I suppose the colony has advanced very much since the discovery of the diamond mines?"

"Yes, but not so much as I expected. Capetown has grown bigger, and, if possible, dirtier. Port Elizabeth, your destination, is a fine flourishing town, whose people have far more push and energy than the drowsy Dutch in the western province. They are extending their railways rapidly inland, though I am afraid it will be many years before there will be freight enough to make them pay. But then, you see, Cape credit is good in

the London money market ; and since the Cape people have had responsible government they have done nothing but float loans for works, the cost of which finds its way back into English pockets. Some day the Cape folk will have to face an awful bill for interest ; and when it comes to redeeming debentures, or whatever they call terminable stocks, I fancy they'll wish responsible government at the bottom of the sea. Just now everything is booming, as the Yankees say. We are building bigger ships and burning more coal, but I'm afraid before long we shall be running as empty as we're full now. You see those two men drinking claret down the table, they're diamond buyers from Kimberley ; this is their second voyage out this year. There's no mistake about it, an enormous amount of money must be made on the Fields. Are you thinking of having a look at them ?"

"Why, yes," replied Bunton ; "I have had a good deal of mining experience in my time, and I mean to see whether I can turn it to account on the Fields."

After breakfast Solomon, who, in the pride of his new outfit, and the possession of more ready money than he had owned for many a long month, was beginning to "put on side," as he would have phrased it, and trying to adapt himself to his improved grade in the social scale, attached himself to the Blowasers, and by his polite attentions and adroit wheedling, rapidly rose to a high place in the estimation of both ladies. Mrs. Blowser, finding it too cold to continue on deck, where the whole party had adjourned after breakfast, presently descended to the ladies' saloon ; the Captain went for-

ward to his chart-house on the bridge to look after the reckoning ; the two Kimberley diamond-buyers sat down to a game of cards in the smoke-room ; the three parsons retired to see how their invalid colleagues were getting on ; Bunton, ensconced in a Madeira chair, went to sleep ; and Master Solomón and the fair Miss Blowser—some malicious people asserted that she had red hair—had the lee-side of the quarter-deck to themselves.

“Ma’s gone to have a snooze ; we shan’t see any more of her till tiffin,” remarked the young lady, extending a highly-ornamental French shoe, and several inches of cardinal silk stocking above it, for Solomon’s admiration. “I wonder how it is that elderly people find it necessary to sleep so much in day-time on board ship. I declare there’s your friend snoring already.”

“I suppose because he hasn’t a nice young lady to talk to,” replied Solomon, whose idea of paying compliments was of a singularly direct and practical character.

Miss Blowser tapped him playfully on the arm with her sunshade. “Now don’t try to deceive me with such nonsense ; I’m sure you’d much sooner be asleep yourself, or playing cards in the smoking-room, than sitting here talking to me. You mustn’t think because I’m colonial born that I don’t know what deceivers you men are.”

“I wish I may die—I mean,” said Solomon, correcting himself, “I would far sooner have the pleasure of your society than all the cards in creation.”

“Oh, yes, I dare say ! But now take me to see the engines ; I want to know all about them.”

She said "ingines," but Solomon was not apt to notice such trifling liberties of pronunciation. He knew nothing whatever about "ingines," nevertheless found it very agreeable to stand beside Miss Blowser, watching the big piston-rods travelling up and down through the stuffing-boxes. He informed his companion that the cylinders were pumps, and gave her a good deal of original information regarding the machinery; but it was all one to her, so long as they found something to talk about; and there was no one by to dispute Solomon's mechanical statements.

Presently a greasy-looking individual, in a linen cap, emerged from the depths below, and mounted one of the iron ladders, oil-can in hand. He opened one of the lubricator taps, poured in some oil, closed it, and opened the lower tap; then he shut that, and opened it again, and finally opened the top one, sending a noisy jet of steam into the air. Miss Blowser uttered a faint, lady-like scream, and clutched hold convulsively of Solomon, who felt it incumbent upon him to support the terrified damsel by a liberal application of his arm to her waist. The fiend with the oil-can, bent upon improving the occasion, moved to the high-pressure cylinder and opened both taps at once, making ten times more din, and filling the engine-room with steam up to the skylights. Miss Blowser did not trouble to scream again, for the steam was making such a noise that her efforts would have been thrown away, but she closed her eyes and allowed her head to fall back on Solomon's shoulder, and gasped painfully as if fainting.

Solomon held her up manfully, though she was by

no means a light burden, but he failed to appreciate the poetry of the situation. He shouted, as loud as he could, "I say, you down there, what the deuce is up with your confounded old tea-kettle? You'll blow the greenhouse to flinders if you go on like this. For goodness' sake put the cork in, can't you?"

But the man didn't hear, or if he did, took no notice. Solomon was beginning to feel uncommonly foolish. "I wonder what the deuce she means," he thought. "I know she's shamming. Suppose the Captain or anybody comes and catches me holding her in my arms like this! No, hang it, that would never do! I say, Miss What's-your-name," he said aloud, "there's somebody coming."

The damsel gasped, but said nothing, and did not offer to resign Solomon's support. "Confound it, but this is a queer start," Solomon thought. "I can't hold her up much longer, and I suppose it wouldn't do to lay her down on these iron plates. If she wasn't such a swell, I believe I would kiss her and risk it. I wonder what she'd say if I did. By Jove, I will." And he did twice.

The maiden opened her eyes dreamily and looked at Solomon. "Why, I declare I believe I fainted, didn't I?" she asked innocently, as Solomon gently loosened his grasp, and allowed her to support herself by both hands on the rail.

Solomon told her what had happened, making the most of the cause of her attack, which he asserted had frightened him exceedingly also.

Miss Blowser soon said she felt sufficiently well to return to the deck, whither Solomon escorted her, won-

dering if she were a fair sample of colonial young ladyhood, and feeling more than a little puzzled at the turn events had taken. After a while he managed to make an excuse to the effect that the doctor had asked him to assist in arranging some papers, and beat a retreat to the smoking-room, where he found Bunton and the two Kimberley men apparently very confidential over a bottle of claret and their cigars. A second bottle was ordered by Bunton, and Solomon passed the remainder of the morning very pleasantly till the luncheon-bell reminded them that man's chief duty on board ship is to eat. A siesta occupied the greater part of the afternoon, and then came a very mild game at whist, at which Bunton took a hand, till dinner, which passed off much more agreeably than on the preceding evening. After dinner Miss Blowser, at the Captain's invitation, performed some complicated evolutions on the piano in the music-room above the main saloon. The strains of the piano—the unfortunate instrument seldom suffered such hard usage as Miss Blowser's brilliant execution involved—attracted several of the passengers to the music-room, amongst them an American who had made his first appearance at the dinner-table that evening.

Solomon and Bunton were standing in the doorway listening to Miss Blowser's crashing chords, when the gentleman from the States came up and joined them. "Fine performer, gentlemen; wonderful quick with her fingers; handles them ivories almost as good as a professional," he observed.

"Yes, the young lady has a good deal of execution," assented the doctor.

"Execution! why she fires it out of that old music-box like a crowd of Colorado cow-boys emptyin' their revolvers at a 'lection. My sakes! how she do make the old thing yell!" returned the other admiringly. "Say, boys, that there music's creatin' a powerful drought in my neighbourhood; will you come and assist me to irrigate?"

Bunton, who, as a connoisseur of music, found Miss Blowser's performance rather irritating, accepted the invitation with alacrity; but Solomon, who was intent upon continuing the morning's flirtation, followed reluctantly, though it was quite a novelty for him to prefer female companionship to the worship of Bacchus. The three gentlemen made themselves comfortable in the smoking-room, Bunton and Solomon seated in the orthodox bolt-upright British manner, and Mr. Cyrus Heath with his feet elevated to the level of his head on the table, and his coat-sleeves comfortably rolled up out of his way.

"I was thunderin' queer yesterday, that's a fact," he said, pouring himself out a glass of whiskey from the bottle which the smoking-room boy had just placed on the table, and tasting it. "I've had plenty of everlasting bad whiskey over yonder, but the stuff I put on board for old Bourbon at them Southampton hotels beat everything in the way of rank poison that ever I sampled. That's pretty good rye; you can leave the bottle, boy. Will you try my native brew, gentlemen, or your home-made article?"

Mr. Heath, unlike most of his countrymen, appeared to be of a communicative disposition, and most of the

conversation came from his side of the table. He had been silver mining in various towns—cities, he called them—in Nevada and Arizona, but the formation of companies had monopolized almost all the payable areas, and the private diggers were being crowded out. Said he, “Last place I was diggin’ in was Tombstone City, in Southern Arizona, the hottest mining camp I ever tackled. I believe we had more coroners’ inquests there in a month than the rest of the State could show in a year. It was a common thing for a hundred or so of the cow-boys from the ranches to come into town and go on the spree, and capsize the whole place. They’d think nothing of goin’ into a bar and shootin’ it up, makin’ everybody drink and sometimes dance into the bargain. And the diggers was a rough lot too; what with them, and the cow-boys, and the card-sharps, the place was often worse’n a regular hell upon earth. But, Lord, I tell you, I seen some wonderful amusin’ things put up there on tender-feet pilgrims, you know, fellers lookin’ out for a place to locate an’ dig. And now an’ then there’d be some swell speculators from the East turn up on the stage; and the way the boys used to clean up the side-walks with them fellers was artistic. One mornin’ I was a standin’ round in front of old Cæsar Hopkins’s saloon, a waitin’ to see the stage come in, along with a crowd of the boys,—the claims was most all flooded out, and we’d had to let up on diggin’—and a report got round that two Boston capitalists was aboard the coach, comin’ up to look at some ground for a company. We was death on companies, you see, because when they start to take up claims in a mine,

private diggers don't stand no show, and has to quit, or work for wages. Well, the boys has a meetin', and gets it up for these yer speculators. Some of 'em pulled the bullets out of their cartridges with their teeth, but there was plenty didn't take that trouble; and then most of 'em goes into the saloon and has drinks. Pretty soon the coach comes along, and out of it hops two fellers in long black coats an' stove-pipes, lookin' like a couple of gospel-sharps bound for a camp-meetin'. Old Cæsar, he steps out an' lifts his hat, as polite as be damned, and tells the nigger to take the gentlemen's luggage in, an' bows 'em into the bar quite obsequious. They goes up and orders a couple of lemon squashes to wash the dust out of their throats; and just as they starts to drink, Mike Riley ups and calls Far-down Jim an all-fired liar, and away they goes to shootin'. The way them shot-guns, an' Winchesters, and six-shooters rattled, and everybody cursin' an' swearin' an' hustlin'—an' laughin' fit to bust all the time—was a caution. By the time the guns and pistols was empty, the bar was so full of smoke you couldn't see yer hand in front of you, and them two Boston chaps was lyin' in a heap on the floor where they'd fainted. When they come to, and wanted to know what all the fightin' was about, old Cæsar tells 'em it was nothin' at all, only some gentlemen had had a slight difference of opinion and settled it in the usual manner: he believed there was eight or nine of 'em killed, and about twenty wounded, but nobody ever troubled about shootin' scrapes in Tombstone. 'The boys is a little quarrelsome among themselves sometimes, gentlemen, but they never think of molestin'

strangers,' he says. 'The blood's all cleaned up now, gentlemen, and your room is ready ; will you allow me to escort you?' But they'd had enough of Tombstone for one visit, and they went on by the same coach they came in. It's a fact we had some very lively times there."

Bunton said, from what he knew of life in the Western States, he fancied it was a little too lively to suit most people for a continuance.

"Well, yes, as a general thing quiet people do find it considerable sultry," Mr. Heath confessed. "I can't say I cared much for it. Somehow they used to let me alone pretty much always, but they killed two of my partners, and after that I got sort of disgusted with the place, and sold out and quit. Then I took a run over to Europe, and I've heard so much talk of these yer dimond diggings that I made up my mind to go out and see what they're made of. I hear you're bound there too?"

"Yes," replied Bunton ; "it is so difficult to find profitable investments now-a-days in the old country, that I have been commissioned by some friends to report upon the Diamond Fields. I have an idea that there is plenty of money to be made there."

The conversation then turned upon South Africa and the Fields, and Solomon managed to slip away unobserved, and joined the party in the music-room. He found Miss Blowser at the piano talking to the ship's doctor. Two of the missionaries were sitting, with their wives, on the sofa facing the instrument, and the two diamond buyers and several other passengers were

lounging about outside on the deck. Both wind and sea had fallen, and the ship was slipping through the water, at nearly fourteen knots, almost as steady as the proverbial church. Solomon leant against the companion, and watched the lady at the piano. Presently she caught sight of him, and complaining of a slight headache, closed the instrument, and rose, the surgeon offering his arm, which she refused.

"Where have you been all the evening?" she asked Solomon pettishly, as she gained the deck. "Card-playing again, I suppose? I'm afraid you're a terrible gambler. That little idiot of a doctor has been talking nonsense till he made my head ache."

"I'm as sorry as blaze—I mean I am awfully sorry," replied Solomon; "but I haven't been playing cards or doing anything wicked. You see I can't leave Doctor Bunton in the lurch altogether. We have been listening to that American fellow's yarns in the smoking-room. I would have cut it long before if I could. I'm sure I was miserable enough, for I was afraid I should be too late to have a talk to you before you went to bed."

"And pray what did you want to talk to me about?" asked the lady coquettishly, looking up into Solomon's eyes as she paced the deck at his side.

"Oh, about lumps of things. I want you to tell me all about the Cape, because I've never been there; and all about yourself, because—because you're awfully nice and we're going to the same shop—place, I mean," and the audacious young man deliberately squeezed the arm that was resting in his.

"I'm afraid you're a flirt, Mr. Davis," said she, taking,

however, no notice of the squeeze, which Solomon promptly repeated.

"I assure you I've not the least idea what the word means," said he ; "you shall teach me if you like."

"Indeed I'll do no such thing. I don't think you want any teaching." By this time they had reached the taffrail, and stood leaning over it, watching the white foam bubbling up from the screw. Presently they got tired of standing, and sat down on the stern-grating, completely hidden from the deck by the after wheel-house.

"Do you like being at sea?" Miss Blowser asked. "I think it's awfully jolly."

"Never enjoyed anything so much in my life ; I could sit here with you for ever," replied Solomon, who was rapidly growing sentimental, a state of feeling which was an entirely new experience, and therefore to be cultivated.

"Oh, you'd very soon get tired of talking to me," said the damsel, shivering a little.

"I'm afraid you'll take cold in that thin dress ; let me run down and get you a shawl, there are lots in the saloon," said Solomon.

"No, no, I must be going directly. Ma will be scandalized if she knows I've been on deck so late. It is getting rather chilly, though."

Solomon passed his arm round her waist, and drew her close to him. She pretended to struggle a little.

"Nobody can possibly see us, dear," he whispered, his lips touching her ear ; "there's no harm in my keeping you warm."

"I don't know about that; but you men are so fond of talking to each other. How do I know that you won't be making fun of me with your Doctor Bunton in half-an-hour's time?"

"Because I'd shoot any one who dared to mention your name disrespectfully, much less think of doing so myself," replied the valiant Solomon, whose compliments were a little at sea, like himself.

"By the way," he continued, "you haven't told me what your name is yet. Please tell me, dear," and he put his head down close to hers; "whisper it then, if you won't tell me aloud."

At length the syllables came—"Fanny!"

"Fanny, darling, you're a—a duck!" exclaimed Solomon, embracing her warmly, and kissing her as if he were thoroughly used to it.

"You mustn't, no, really, you mustn't," murmured the young lady thus gracefully apostrophized. "Do pray let me go, Mr. Davis; some one may come and see us. Oh, please, please; how rough you are!"

They were standing up now, and the fair Miss Blowser was fast locked in Solomon's arms.

However, he was of too calculating a nature to care about risking a scene, and he gently released his burden. She stood beside him trembling from head to foot.

"For shame, you naughty boy!" she stammered at length; "I'm quite angry with you. Good night, I'm going to bed," and she turned to leave him.

"Not like that," said Solomon, encircling her waist with his arm again. "Say good night prettily, and I'll take you down."

She turned her face up to his, and let him kiss her as he listed. A footstep sounded as if advancing along the deck.

"Good night, dear ; remember, not a word to any one," and she kissed him on the lips, and was out of sight next moment.

Solomon stood staring after her into the darkness for some minutes ; then he thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled gently. A smile stole up from the corners of his mouth, and at last found audible expression in a curious half-internal laugh. "I wish I may die every day in the week," said he softly, "if this isn't the queerest thing that has ever happened to me ! She actually kissed me, called me dear, too ! Well, I am damned : that's what's the matter !"

CHAPTER VI.

A SHAREHOLDERS' MEETING

CAPTAIN CORMACK waited until the *Gaul* was out of sight, and then walked back to the railway station, and inquired when the next funeral procession started for London. Finding that it was impossible for him to get back before nine o'clock, he decided to dine at Southampton and go up by the last train, which was timed to perform the journey to Waterloo in three hours, and generally managed to do it in four, except when the Jersey boat came in late, or there happened to be over a dozen passengers.

It was close upon two o'clock when the Captain reached his lodgings. He spent the greater part of the following morning examining the papers Bunton had left with him, making up accounts, and writing letters. In the afternoon he paid several visits, amongst others, calling upon his fellow-directors in the Cornish tin mining enterprise, and arranging with them a plan of operations when they should be brought face to face with the shareholders. This was a matter of no great difficulty. None of the directors had ever seen the so-called mining property, and according to the books, they had all invested considerable sums in the enter-

prise, and appeared to be the largest losers by its collapse. The books were all *en règle*, and proved nothing, except that money had been received from shareholders, and paid out by cheque to various engineering firms for machinery, to the Company's manager for salaries and wages, and for other purposes. The secretary could not be implicated, for he knew nothing officially beyond the office work of the Company, and produced vouchers for all his disbursements. Bunton had worked the whole thing himself. The firms, whose receipts for large payments for machinery the secretary held; the manager, whose certified pay-sheets and vouchers were all so neatly docketed in the pigeon-holes, were simply fictions of the doctor's, who had managed the Company's bank-account so as to completely deceive the bank officials. Of course the plunder had been divided to a certain extent, the doctor and the Captain taking the lion's share of it. But the other directors, though they grumbled when they discovered how little they had made by the transaction as compared with Bunton and Cormack, dared do no more, for they were all in the same boat, and completely under Cormack's thumb.

It was decided then to await the result of the publican's visit to Cornwall, and when the thunderbolt descended, to meet the shareholders with a plea of injured innocence. The Company's stock was principally held by small shop-keepers, clerks, and other persons of small means; and Cormack argued that when these people were convinced that their money was hopelessly lost, they would not be likely to risk more in instituting legal proceedings against the Board,

when they found that the worst they could prove was neglect and ignorance of the first principles of business.

So it was arranged that the secretary should go to the office as usual, and in a couple of days' time notify the remaining directors that Bunton, their chairman and managing director, had not attended at the office for some days, and that nothing was to be heard of him at his lodgings; and, further, announce that there were several matters touching which he required instructions. This programme was carried out to the letter. Cormack was sitting at lunch when he received the secretary's note, which procured him a hearty fit of laughter. He had just finished writing a reply to the effect that he was very busy, but would endeavour to call at the office the following afternoon, when there was a ring at the front door, and Jane entered with a telegram. The message was from the secretary, as follows:—"Sampson just left, vowing vengeance. To pacify him, promised wire directors, meet him here three to-day. Have wired others. Better come and get it over."

Cormack, who was always prompt in everything he did, good, bad, or indifferent, took a hansom and drove at once to the residences of his colleagues, finding only two out of the three at home. The three then proceeded to the office, and had some consultation with the secretary, after which the whole party adjourned to a neighbouring tavern and fortified themselves to receive the enemy. They had only just taken their seats in the den which they dignified by the name of Board-room, when the opposition, consisting of eight or nine seedy-looking clerks and counters-jumpers, headed by

Mr. Sampson, his face aflame, and looking as if he were in imminent danger of apoplexy, entered the room.

The Captain rose to receive them with a bland "Good afternoon, gentlemen," which was echoed by his colleagues, and called forth a faint response from some of the publican's followers, much to his disgust. The secretary managed to borrow sufficient chairs from other persons having offices in the building to accommodate the whole party with seats, which they took in ominous silence.

Cormack then rose, and opened the proceedings by saying that he and his colleagues had been greatly astonished at receiving a telegram from the secretary, asking them to assemble at the office at three o'clock, to meet Mr. Sampson and other shareholders. As soon as he received his message he had called upon his brother directors, but only two of them were in town, and they at once arranged to attend this meeting. He regretted the absence of their chairman, who was the only practical man on the Board, and the only one who understood the Company's affairs; but failing his presence, he and his colleagues were quite willing, in fact they were most anxious, to furnish all the information in their power. He understood from the secretary that Mr. Sampson had made some statements of a very startling nature, which he supposed he would now repeat for the information of the directors. As the meeting was virtually a general meeting of shareholders, he would call upon those present to elect a chairman from amongst themselves. And with that the Captain

resumed his seat, smiling benignly, and looking as calm and collected as three per cent. Government stock.

The shareholders wanted the publican to preside, but he explained sententiously that it would be impossible for him to do justice to the case against the directors if he were compelled to take the chair. The little man's attitude was as insulting as his words were bumptious, and Cormack was on his feet again in a moment.

"Gentlemen," said he, drawing himself up to his full height, and deliberately turning his confident gaze into the eyes of each of the publican's followers in succession, "I understand that, at the last meeting, which I was unfortunately prevented from attending, the person who has just spoken made it his business to be exceptionally offensive to my brother directors. I simply wish to warn him that I am not here to suffer his insolence, and that he will find me quite a different person to deal with to those whom he insulted on that occasion. I am quite ready to hear whatever he may have to say about the management of the Company's affairs, provided he addresses the Board in the language of gentlemen, but I will not listen to abuse," and he sat down amidst timid murmurs of applause from his two colleagues.

At length, after a great deal of whispering at the other end of the room, the chair was taken by a linen-draper, whose establishment adjoined that of Mr. Sampson, on whose recommendation he had invested in five shares in the Blackstone Company.

The draper was by no means a fluent speaker, and seemed to have a very indistinct idea as to what the meeting had been called for. Having stumbled through

half-a-dozen sentences, he called upon his friend Mr. Sampson to address the meeting. The publican, whose ardour had cooled considerably since Cormack's address, took some papers from a pile in front of him, got on his little legs, and cleared his throat. "Gentlemen," he began, "I shall not detain you long, and I will try not to lose my temper. After what occurred at the last meeting of shareholders in this Company, I made it my duty to visit the so-called mining property in Cornwall, and I wish, to-day, to describe to you what I saw. On arriving at the railway station, which is fifteen miles from the estate" ("Question!" from Cormack), "instead of upon it, as stated by the prospectus, I asked the station-master if he could direct me to the Blackstone Company's works. He looked astonished, and declared he had never so much as heard the name of the concern. I asked the porters; they knew nothing of it either. I went to the Railway Hotel and asked the landlord, and he said he thought it must be something to do with a Doctor Bunton who had stayed at his house for a night occasionally some time ago. Then I knew I was on the track. I made more inquiries in the village, and the result was, I got a land-agent to drive me over to a farm about fifteen miles off, which Doctor Bunton bought, but forgot to pay for" ("That's cowardly; remember he isn't here to defend himself," interpolated the Captain), "just before the Blackstone Company was started. Well, gentlemen, when I got there, over fifteen miles of the worst roads that ever I travelled, I found everything just as the engineer we sent down to inspect described it. There was the old chap, Poltrenick, living

in a hut ; the two disused wells, or shafts, or whatever they are ; and the devil a fraction of machinery or mining gear of any kind on the whole place. The land-agent laughed when I showed him the Company's prospectus, and told him I had taken shares on the strength of it. He said that lots of swindles of the same kind had been got up on disused mines in Cornwall, which was so out-of-the-way that shareholders seldom troubled to come down and inspect before they invested. I employed him to give me a certificate of the nature and extent of the property, and I have it here, in the form of an affidavit. I also have another affidavit from the owner of the farm, stating that it was purchased by Doctor Richard Bunton for £400, of which £10 only has been paid. I have seen my lawyer this morning, and he advises me that there is a clear case of fraud against the promoters ; but before lodging information against them, I thought it better to ask them to attend a meeting, and hear the charges that will be brought against them, so as to give them an opportunity of answering the accusation if it be in their power to do so."

Cormack's face during the latter portion of the publican's speech had assumed an expression of horrified astonishment, which his two colleagues were doing their best to imitate.

The secretary's head was hidden in one of the ledgers : he was laughing luxuriously, but no one except Cormack suspected that.

Cormack whispered for some seconds to the other two directors, before he attempted to reply to the last

speaker. At length he rose. "Mr. Chairman and shareholders in the Blackstone Company, I am utterly at a loss what to say in reply to the extraordinary statement which we have just heard. I have known Doctor Bunton for some years, and I have always found him honourable and straight-forward in matters of business. Neither I nor either of my colleagues who are present to-day have ever visited the Company's property. We invested in it on the recommendation of Doctor Bunton, and if the state of affairs be really such as the publican has just described, we shall lose very much more heavily than other shareholders. I cannot help thinking that some incomprehensible mistake has been made as to the Company's property. The secretary tells me the books are all in order, and ready for the inspection of an auditor or accountant at any moment. I called at Doctor Bunton's lodgings this morning, and was informed that he had gone out of town, without telling the people of the house his destination. I naturally concluded that he had gone down to Cornwall, as he was in the habit of doing occasionally, on the Company's business. Now I confess I do not know what to make of his absence. But before going any further into this most unpleasant matter, gentlemen, I think it will be well for us to hear from the secretary what the exact financial position of the Company is."

The secretary was then called upon to supply this information, and after a rapid inspection of the ledger, he replied that the Company owed three months' office-rent, salary to himself for the same period, and that there were sundry other accounts for advertising,

printing, stationery, and other items outstanding. There was only a trifling amount to their credit at the bank, but he had received advices from the manager that he was in treaty for the sale of a large quantity of ore, which would, he expected, place them well in funds again. Doctor Bunton had stated—but here he was interrupted by the publican. “Look here, Mr. Secretary, the less you say about your Dr. Bunton the better, it’s clear enough that he has swindled us and bolted. I believe you and the other directors are all in the swim with him. If you are, I can only say you are the most impudent pack of thieves——”

“Retract that, or I shall throw you out of window!” thundered Cormack, rising, and moving towards the speaker, whose supporters turned blue with fright.

“Well, not thieves, but I mean to say it’s an infernal shame that we should be cheated out of our money; and I for one will not be satisfied till the scoundrel who has done it is convicted,” and he sat down, glaring defiance at Cormack and his friends.

“Abuse will do no good, gentlemen, and you will kindly recollect that if we have been defrauded, which as yet I cannot bring myself to credit, we are far heavier sufferers than you are. Besides taking a large number of shares in the Company, I advanced the whole of the preliminary expenses, amounting to several hundred pounds, out of my own pocket, and the secretary can tell you that not a penny of that money has ever been repaid. I know nothing personally of the Company’s property, for I have never seen it. I advanced money and subscribed for shares solely on Dr. Bunton’s representations, which,

as I had known him for some time, and always found him trustworthy, I received in perfect good faith. I cannot account for his absence at this critical juncture, and must admit that appearances are against him. Of course it is natural for people who believe that they have been cheated to wish to put the law in motion against the offender, but punishing him will not get our money back or any portion of it. It seems to me that it would be better to combine, and endeavour to save something out of the fire, before advertising to the world the fact that we have been swindled. I am not much accustomed to business myself, but it appears to me that the first thing we should do is to engage a professional accountant to examine the books and give us a plain statement, such as we can all understand, of the Company's position."

"That is all very well, but who is to pay an accountant? We know well enough that the money is gone, and that is all we want to know," said the chairman.

"Pardon me," said Cormack, "I at least should be glad to have some idea as to where it has gone to. I am quite willing to be responsible for my *pro rata* share of the expense of employing professional assistance; my colleagues will also provide their quota."

"Where's the use of throwing good money after bad?" asked the publican, excitedly. "It will cost us nothing to put the culprit in prison, and that is all the satisfaction I ask for."

"Excuse me, before anything of that kind can be attempted, I believe I am right in saying that the Company will have to be formally wound up in bank-

ruptcy,—I think that is what the lawyers call it,—and that is sure to be an expensive process. As we are, things are simply at a dead-lock, and whatever action we may decide upon taking, we shall have to make provision for expenses.”

“Not another penny will I spend upon the cursed swindle!” ejaculated the publican, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang.

No one spoke for some minutes, then the secretary rose, and placing the keys and books on the table, said, “Gentlemen, since I see no prospect of receiving my salary for the last three months, I beg to tender my resignation, and deliver the keys of the office and the Company’s books to the meeting. The books are in perfect order, and beyond them I have never had anything to do with the transactions of the Company. I shall be obliged if the directors present will give me a receipt for the keys and books, and an indemnity relieving me of all further responsibility.”

“We can have no objection to that, I think,” said Cormack, after consulting his colleagues.

“I suppose we had better take charge of the books?” to the publican.

“Oh, burn the books if you like! I wash my hands of the whole concern,” snarled that individual.

“Well, it certainly is a most unpleasant state of affairs, gentlemen, perhaps more so for us than for yourselves. I am sure I don’t know what is to be the end of it.”

“Hang me if I care!” said Mr. Sampson. “It’s no use our staying here any longer. I shall go, at any rate,”

and he took his hat and bounced out of the room, followed more slowly by the other shareholders, who were completely cowed, and afraid to face the Captain, now that their self-elected champion had deserted them. Cormack made a show of calling them back, but as the secretary closed the door on the last of them, he threw himself back in his chair and fairly exploded.

"Beautiful, sublime, splendid, magnificent!" he exclaimed, between the laughs; "I'd have given fifty pounds if Bunton could have been hidden in that cupboard and heard it all. Here, Jack,"—to the secretary,—“here's your receipt for the books. And now lock up the office, pitch the key in the street, leave the chairs and tables for the landlord, and come and help me to drink peace to the Company's ashes, for that's all in the shape of assets that ever any one will see out of it.”

The three directors lit their cigars and followed the secretary, who handed the key of the office to the porter, saying, with a grin, that the shareholders would have no trouble in obtaining it from him, into the street, and the whole party adjourned to the tavern they had patronized earlier in the afternoon. The Captain ordered some champagne, and the obsequies of the Company were performed in a humorous and agreeable manner, each of the directors presenting the secretary, who was a *protégé* of Cormack's, with a five-pound note to make up for his unpaid salary. One of the directors was still a good deal troubled with fears of possible proceedings on the part of the shareholders, but Cormack, who was in wonderful spirits, soon laughed him out of them.

"Do?" he asked; "why, what on earth can they do?"

Make the Company bankrupt? It's bankrupt already. Enter a criminal action? Not against us, for there isn't the faintest shadow of evidence. And they'll have to catch Bunton, which will not be done for nothing, before they can touch him. No, they will do just nothing. There may be a fuss in the papers, but I hardly expect it, because our shareholders are not the class of men who fly into print; and we may get lawyers' letters, calling upon us to refund, and that sort of thing, which we shall light our pipes with. But there will be no proceedings, because there is nothing to proceed with. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, as we used to learn at school. We're out of it, and devilish well out of it, thank the fates!"

The session did not break up until close upon six o'clock, when the secretary and Cormack's two colleagues went down to Greenwich to dinner, after trying in vain to persuade him to accompany them.

"No, thanks," he replied to their persistent invitations, "I've heard quite enough about the Company for one day, and you fellows will talk of nothing else all through dinner. I'm going to see a couple of friends out Bayswater way. You know where to find me if you should want me. Good-bye, and enjoy yourselves."

The Captain chartered a hansom, and was set down, after a long drive, at the address given him by Hayes and Caldecott. He sent in his name, and a few minutes afterwards was shaking hands with the two youngsters, who seemed very pleased to see him.

"You see, I've had a hard day of it in the City, and I feel uncommonly lonely now that Bunton is away, so I thought I would look you up and get you to dine with

me, and then we'll go somewhere or other to finish the evening."

The district railway soon landed the party at Charing Cross, and after a brief visit to Cormack's lodgings, they adjourned to a neighbouring restaurant, and had a very pleasant little dinner. Hayes informed his host that they were going up for their examination in a few days, and had both made up their minds to be ploughed.

"Well, and what then?" asked the Captain; "there's no disgrace in being ploughed in an exam. like the Indian Civil. Why, I was ploughed for everything I went up for at Cambridge; it got to be a regular matter of course."

"Oh, we don't want to pass, you know," explained Caldecott; "I never could see the fun of spending one's existence grilling in India, unless one were downright obliged to do it for a living. Both Hayes and I will be able to exist without going to India for a salary. I suppose my governor decided that I should have a shy at the exam. to keep me out of mischief; he knows well enough that I should never stand the ghost of a chance of passing."

"I wish the ordeal were over, all the same," said Hayes; "I hate the idea of sitting stewing in that stuffy examination-room. I've a good mind to go to the doctor and get an *ægrotat*."

"No, hang it! you can't leave me in the lurch like that," remarked Caldecott. "Anyhow we shall have a jolly three months' spell abroad after the exam.'s over, and our goose is finally cooked."

"Going abroad, eh?" queried the Captain. "I was

thinking of taking a run over to Paris myself in a few days, but I don't care much about going alone."

"Why not wait till the exam. is over, and join us? It would be rare fun travelling together. Hayes and I have been to Paris once, but we're awful duffers at French, and as for German or Italian, neither of us can even swear in them. I'll tell you what, you shall come down and see the governor, and we'll get him to ask you to take us for a tour on the Continent as our tutor. Wouldn't that be prime?" said Caldecott.

"The very thing, by Jove!" said Hayes. "It was only the other day my pater was saying he wished he knew some one he could send me abroad with. He don't like to trust me alone. As an old soldier he would cotton to you at once."

After a good deal more conversation on the same subject, it was arranged that Cormack should accompany the two young men on a visit to Caldecott's guardian at Henley the following Sunday, when the proposition should be laid before him, leaving Hayes's father, whom his dutiful son described as an easy-going old buffer, to be subsequently dealt with.

Later in the evening the three friends paid a visit to the Alhambra, after which they had supper at the Captain's lodgings; and when Hayes and Caldecott wished their host good-night, the Continental project was looked upon as practically settled by all three of them.

CHAPTER VII.

A DUCKING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

THE first thing that met the Captain's eyes as he was dividing his attention between his solitary breakfast and the paper the next morning, was a paragraph headed "Great Fire in the City." He read the first two lines, and then, jumping up, took the paper over to the window, so as to be able to decipher the small type with greater ease. There it was plain enough, and no mistake about it. The whole block of buildings in which the Blackstone Company's offices were situated had been destroyed by fire, the first alarm of which had been given at eight o'clock the previous evening. The various firms and companies having offices in the buildings were enumerated, mention also being made of the amounts for which, and the offices where, they were insured. The paragraph stated that the building had been completely destroyed, the only articles recovered being a couple of iron safes, but the heat had been so fierce that the books and documents they contained were considerably damaged.

"Well, there go all the evidences of the Blackstone Company's existence, at any rate," said the Captain to himself. The Company had been too economical to

invest in a safe, and the secretary had been obliged to content himself with an ordinary deal cupboard as the repository of his books and documents.

Cormack finished his breakfast and paper leisurely, and then went down to the city to have a look at the damage, and hear what people were saying about the fire. He met his friend, the secretary, standing amongst a crowd of clerks belonging to the various concerns whose premises had suffered.

"Well, Jack, they won't be able to make you produce your books in court now. Is there any idea as to how the fire was caused?" asked the Captain of his *protégé*.

"Of course there are all sorts of theories, but none that I have heard yet is anywhere near the truth."

"The truth! Do you know anything about it?"

"That's good! Why, of course I do. So do you."

"I? Upon my word I haven't the remotest notion as to how it started."

"Nonsense, man; think a little."

"Well, it won't do to stand talking here; come and have a drink and tell me what you mean."

As soon as they were comfortably seated in a private room at their favourite tavern, the secretary said, "What was the last thing we did before we left the office yesterday?"

"Why, we locked the books up, to be sure."

"No; after that?"

"I'm sure I don't remember," replied Cormack.

"Oh yes, you do. We all lit cigars."

"Well; so we did. What then?"

"Why, you threw your lighted match into the waste-paper basket, which was nearly full. I saw the paper catch fire, but I said nothing, because I thought if the place were to burn down what a merciful interposition of Providence it would be."

"By Jove! what a careless fellow I am! I assure you I never noticed where the match fell," said Cormack.

"I know you didn't. Neither of the others saw it, so we need say nothing about it. It's a deuced good thing for us all the same. I suppose there will be some sort of inquiry at which we shall have to appear. We shall actually make money by this accident—ahem!—for the office-furniture and fittings were insured for £150. I suppose we must claim the insurance just for the appearance of the thing?"

The inquiry took place in due course, and both Cormack, his fellow directors, and the secretary were examined, but nothing elicited from them threw any light upon the cause of the fire.

The inquiry was adjourned, and again adjourned, but nothing ever came of it. The Blackstone Company claimed and received their insurance, and out of it paid the office rent, and several other small accounts which were outstanding; what became of the balance, neither the shareholders nor any one else ever succeeded in discovering. For a time Cormack and the other directors received indignant letters at intervals from shareholders and their solicitors, but at length people wearied of troubling them, and nothing more was heard of the Blackstone Tin-Mining Company.

Cormack wrote full accounts of all that had occurred to Bunton, adding that he should endeavour to carry out the proposal for a continental tour with Hayes and Caldecott; as it might be not only profitable in itself, but the means of securing introductions which would be valuable in connection with future enterprises.

The Sunday following the inquiry into the fire in Gresham Street was one of those lovely summer days, so rare in London, that seem to throw a holiday air over everything, and instil into the sombre cockney something of the mercurial spirit that distinguishes the careless, pleasure-loving Parisian. Cormack met Hayes and Caldecott by appointment at Paddington, and the three took their seats in an early train for Henley, having arranged to breakfast at that renowned hostelry, the 'Red Lion,' and to walk thence to West Hall, about a mile up the river, where Caldecott's guardian, Mr. Monkton, resided.

The train rattled merrily out past Westbourne Park, and away from the jangling discord of church-bells into the still, sweet morning air of the green fields, stopping at way stations to discharge crowds of flashily-dressed 'Arries and their sweethearts of the hour, who looked as if they had all been shot out of a music-hall; and here and there landing a clerical gentleman from London, on his way to preach a charity sermon, or take a country service for some lazy or ailing brother parson.

Henley was reached soon after nine o'clock, and our friends, having gone to the extravagance of ordering a special breakfast and private room, walked into the garden in front of the hotel, and amused themselves

watching the manœuvres of an ancient personage in a punt with a white umbrella opposite, who was endeavouring to beguile the public and himself into the belief that he was fishing; whereas, as a matter of fact, he was more than half asleep, and in considerable danger of tumbling head-first out of his chair into fully twenty feet of water.

He was a short, stout old gentleman, and the little bit of his face that was visible beneath the umbrella, which had slipped from his grasp on to his hat, by which it was supported, was of that brilliant ruby tint that one often sees associated with bushy white whiskers, and a certain jovial rotundity of countenance and body, in the persons of retired naval and military men in comfortable circumstances.

The little old gentleman nodded forward, nearly lost his balance, pulled himself backward, and very nearly toppled over in that direction (for he more than made up in breadth what he lacked in length), and the punt was a crank, flimsy craft that swayed and rocked with every motion of his body.

"I tell you what it is, boys," said Cormack; "it isn't safe to leave that little old fellow backing and filling like that. He'll be head-over-heels into the water before long; and he doesn't look as if he could swim. Suppose one of you take a boat from the steps there, and paddle over and wake him up? He'd set the river on fire with that flaming countenance of his, if he were to capsize; and it promises to be quite warm enough for comfort as it is."

Caldecott went down the steps in response to the

Captain's suggestion, and began to loosen the painter of one of the boats fastened there.

"Hurry up, Waggles! quick, man. By Jove, there he goes!" exclaimed Hayes; and, sure enough splash went the disciple of Isaac Walton head-first, umbrella and all, into the water.

Hayes and the Captain threw off their coats, waistcoats, and boots, dashed down the bank, and into the river before the astonished Caldecott had disentangled the painter. He whipped his knife out, cut the rope, and putting the sculls into the rowlocks was soon close to where the occupant of the punt had gone down, and the other two had dived for him. Presently a cluster of bubbles came to the surface of the water, close to the boat, and immediately afterwards Cormack's head followed.

"Here he is; I've got him! Bear a hand, Hayes."

Hayes had come up at the same moment a few yards further down, and at once swam up and assisted in supporting the involuntary bather, whose head hung forward helplessly on his chest.

"Now then, get your left arm under his right, and grasp his left side. That's it. Go ahead!"

A few strokes of Caldecott's sculls brought the boat within reach; and with some little trouble the old gentleman was pulled on board, and laid down in the stern sheets. The two others jumped in, and seizing the oars assisted Caldecott to reach the steps, where several people belonging to the hotel had collected.

As they were lifting the apparently lifeless body of the unlucky angler from the boat, Hayes, for the first

time, obtained a full view of his face. He staggered back, turning as white as a ghost.

"What's up, old chap?" asked Caldecott, staring at him.

"My God! it's my governor!" he stammered, with the tears in his eyes.

"By Jove, so it is," said Caldecott, examining the features more closely than he had as yet done; "what a mercy we happened to be here! He'll be all right in a few minutes, never fear!"

Cormack, who had been bending over the body, moving the arms up and down, now looked up. "He's safe now, see!" as the General gasped, and relieved himself of some of the water he had swallowed. Presently he opened his eyes for a second, and breathed more strongly, though with great effort.

"Now then, carry him up to the hotel, and put him to bed with plenty of warm blankets. I think you may as well bring a doctor,"—to one of the waiters who was standing by. "I tell you what it is, my boy; your father may thank his stars that we happened to be here this morning; if we hadn't, you'd have been wearing a black hat-band to-morrow;" and he patted Hayes on the shoulder.

There chanced to be a medical man staying at the hotel, and he gladly took charge of General Hayes; who, having been put to bed, and subjected to a not altogether unpleasant course of treatment—of which hot whiskey toddy formed a leading feature—soon did the best thing possible under the circumstances, and dropped into a profound sleep.

As soon as the General was fairly under the doctor's charge, our three friends proceeded to do justice to their breakfast, which, although they had kept it waiting over half-an-hour, seemed none the worse for the delay. The proprietor of the hotel and the doctor had very kindly provided them with dry raiment, and having done ample justice to the good things for which the 'Red Lion' used to be, and I have no doubt still is, celebrated, they again repaired to the garden, where they found themselves seats, and enjoyed their cigars, and the consciousness of having performed a good deed. It was arranged that they should postpone their walk to West Hall, where they were due for lunch, until the General woke up, and they could decide whether there were any further need for their attendance; and a messenger was despatched to Mr. Monkton's, bearing a note from Caldecott explaining what had happened.

As they more than half expected, Mr. Monkton himself drove over in his phaeton as soon as he received the note; and, being an old friend of General Hayes, was most profuse in his thanks and compliments to Cormack, to whom the two youngsters insisted the whole credit of the rescue was due.

The Captain, whose manners seemed to adapt themselves automatically to his surroundings, laid himself out to please Caldecott's guardian, a retired banker in affluent circumstances, and soon succeeded in creating a marked impression in his favour.

Mr. Monkton would not leave the hotel until his friend was sufficiently recovered to be able to return to West Hall with him; and the four gentlemen spent a

very pleasant morning together in the garden : the two seniors doing most of the talking, while Caldecott was on his best behaviour in the presence of his guardian, who, however, was by no means a particularly awe-inspiring personage, and Hayes considerably sobered by the accident to his father, to whose bed-room he paid frequent visits.

About four o'clock the patient woke up, and was very much astonished when his son and Mr. Monkton told him what had happened. It appeared that he had run away from home on the sly to enjoy a few days' fishing—a sport to which, like many lazy men, he was much addicted ; and had selected Henley for his excursion, because the fishing and the fare there were equally good, and not with any idea of visiting his old friend Mr. Monkton, at whose house he was a frequent and honoured guest.

The whole party went over to West Hall for dinner, the General and Cormack driving with Mr. Monkton, and the two youngsters on foot. Cormack was introduced to the ladies of the family, and so delighted Mrs. Monkton, who was an advanced Exeter-Hallite, and a patroness of the Aborigines Protection Society, with his account of various travels amongst the savage tribes of South Africa and other regions,—where it is perhaps needless to remark the gallant warrior had never been,—and with artfully interpolated references to the kind treatment he had received from the missionaries, that she declared he ought to have been a missionary himself, and subsequently informed her husband that she considered Captain Cormack a noble example of what a Christian and a British soldier should be.

Hayes and Caldecott followed the ladies out of the dining-room after dinner, in obedience to a hint from the Captain, who asked them to leave him to make the running with the two old gentlemen with reference to the projected tour.

There were two Miss Monktons, attractive girls of seventeen and nineteen, with the elder of whom Hayes was evidently *épris*; while Caldecott appeared disposed to make himself agreeable to the younger.

The examination commenced at ten the following morning, and the two aspirants to Indian judgeships were glad to make the most of their time.

"Two fine young fellows," said the Captain, as the door closed upon his prospective pupils, "it seems almost a pity to condemn them to spend the best years of their existence in the East."

The General laughed as he blew a huge cloud from his cigar towards the ceiling, "Aha! so Master Frank has been trying to enlist your sympathies in his favour. I know he thinks he has been very hardly used—I don't. I am almost inclined to believe that he stands no more chance of passing this Indian examination than I should. But, to tell you the truth, I did not know what to do with him for a year or two. He showed symptoms, like every spirited youngster, of an inclination to be wild before he left school. I knew that if I left him there, after he was seventeen and in the sixth form, he would learn no more, and might disgrace himself by being expelled for one of those amiable indiscretions which men of the world think very little of, but which are capital offences in the eyes of pedagogues. I

saw that Frank had got his head full of other things besides Latin and Greek and mathematics ; and I took him away from school because he was doing no good, and was likely to make an ass of himself. We had him at home for some time ; but though I don't believe there's an ounce of vice or bad principle in the boy, he managed to scandalize his mother and the other ladies of the family by his free-and-easy ways. I offered to send him to college ; but he had no taste for more Latin and Greek, and I knew that he would be certain to get into disgrace with the authorities. Meanwhile my friend Monkton here was puzzling his brains as to what to do with his ward, young Caldecott, who was a school-fellow of my Frank's, and about the same age ; we had many a discussion on the subject, but never seemed to get any nearer a decision, until a nephew of mine, who had attained a very high position in the Madras Civil Service, happened to come home on furlough, and strongly advised us to let them read with a tutor with the idea of passing the examination. I had strong doubts as to Frank's capability of passing, even if he made up his mind to work hard, which he was not very likely to do. But Monkton urged the plan so strongly that I believe I worried Frank into consenting to be crammed against his will ; and we sent them to Mr. Bird's, where they have been ever since. I don't think either of them has a chance of passing ; but that is really a matter of secondary importance. Both were too young to be let loose eighteen months ago ; and they have done no harm, if they haven't done much good, during the interval. You see I married late in

life ; and I'm too old to move about with Frank, and see that he doesn't get into mischief ; so I thought it best to leave him at Bird's till the examination was over, and then in the event of his failing, which is almost a certainty, I should like him to go abroad for a while. But he won't hear of going without young Caldecott ; and Monkton doesn't care to trust his ward to his own devices."

"The boy's as wild as a hawk, Captain Cormack," observed Mr. Monkton ; "I dare say you have noticed what a young monkey he is ? Perhaps I should be less particular if he were my own son ; but his father was my best friend, and his last words to me were, 'Keep the boy straight, if you can.' His own death was certainly accelerated by the riotous life he led when a youth, and I fancy sometimes that Master Walter has a tendency to burn the candle at both ends, like his father before him."

"Well, I can't help disagreeing with you there," said Cormack ; "it is quite true that I have only known him a very short time ; but, then, I have been with him in places such as theatres, billiard-rooms, and so on, where such a tendency, if it existed, would have been almost certain to show itself. I don't mean to say, you understand, that he, in fact both of them, are not high-spirited, open-hearted fellows, who might possibly be led into an occasional indiscretion. What I mean to convey is that I think, considering their age and experience, they are well able to take care of themselves. There's something healthy and honest about their faces that takes one at first sight, and I must say I never

met two youngsters who made so favourable an impression on me."

"I am very glad to hear you speak thus," said the General, who had created a considerable vacuum in his second bottle of port. "It's a great pleasure to me to know that my Frank has been so fortunate as to secure the friendship of a man of your experience and attainments. I do not believe in saints, in fact I despise them most cordially. But there are limits to be observed in the process of sowing one's wild oats, and it is not always easy to get young men now-a-days to respect them. Frank tells me that you are thinking of going abroad yourself shortly. May I ask what part of the continent you intend visiting?"

"Oh, I hadn't made up my mind to any particular route, General. I thought I wanted a change, and that Paris would be a good point to start from. There is nothing to keep me in town; and I want to kill time as agreeably as possible for the next three months or so, after which I shall most likely take a run out to the Cape to see some old friends at the Diamond Fields."

"I wish I were better able to get about," said General Hayes; "I was very fond of travelling in my younger days, but I'm not up to it now. Monkton there could manage to go with the two youngsters if he chose; but he's too fond of his easy life down here, and won't hear of it."

"Quite true, Captain Cormack; I hate your trains and steam-boats, and custom officers, and above all foreign inns. I can't speak a word of any language but

my own, and I am so fond of the old place here, with its shady trees, and quiet, lazy river, that I should be almost pleased if any one were to tell me I should never go beyond the boundary of my own fences again. As for consenting to travel in the capacity of bear-leader to a brace of scatter-brained boys on the continent, I declare I would sooner hear that they were up to all the maddest pranks in Christendom, than that I should be intrusted with the task of looking after them. Besides," continued Mr. Monkton, "I am not so much younger than you are, Hayes; and I can plead the gout, which is more than you can do as yet," and he smiled at Cormack across the decanters, which had managed to congregate in a batch in front of General Hayes's rubicund countenance.

"Well, I suppose the end of it will be that we shall have to advertise for some one to accompany them as tutor. I am quite willing that Frank should go alone," said General Hayes; "but he won't hear of leaving young Caldecott behind; and as you won't consent to his taking his chance unprotected, we must either give the project up, or get somebody we can trust to go with them, and keep them in order. But, upon my word, I don't know whether we shall find it so easy to secure a suitable person."

"If I were a man of learning," said Cormack, laughing, as if he thought the idea a good joke, "I should not mind accepting the trust myself. But I forgot the little Latin and Greek that ever I knew years ago. And as for mathematics, I always abominated them, and ignored their existence as far as possible. But I

should think you would have little difficulty in finding a qualified man to take the post."

"It isn't a tutor the boys want," said General Hayes, "at least, not a tutor in the ordinary acceptation of the term—a sort of quasi-clerical young man, who would be preaching half his time and praying the other half. No, joking apart, my dear sir, I am sure if we could persuade you to take charge of them, the boys could not possibly be in better hands. But you were only joking, of course; they would worry you out of your life."

"I assure you I was serious enough. I am very fond of young companions, being blessed perhaps with rather a liberal allowance of high spirits myself. No, they wouldn't worry me the least in the world; in fact, I should be glad of their company. But as for my undertaking to teach them anything, the very idea is simply preposterous," and he laughed heartily.

"My dear Captain," observed Mr. Monkton, "we don't want you to teach them anything whatever. As regards young Caldecott, all I wish to feel sure of is that he is with some one who has sufficient knowledge of the world and influence with him to prevent his getting into scrapes, such as so many young Englishmen do contrive to get into on the continent. You understand what I mean—ballet-girls, gambling, betting, and so on. You see, he comes into a large fortune—his income will be over eight thousand a year—in a few months, when he attains his majority; it has been tolerably carefully nursed for him during his minority, and I should be very sorry to see him form reckless habits before he is old enough to have any settled

notions as to the value of money, and the duties of a man who has plenty of it."

"Frank, too, will have a good income, irrespective of what I may provide him with," said the General; "for a bachelor brother of mine, who died twenty years ago, made him his heir before he discarded the feeding-bottle; and the estate has increased very much in value, thanks to Monkton's careful investments, since then. So you see there is no need for them to learn anything except how to take care of themselves and their money."

"Well, I dare say I might be able to give them some useful hints in that direction," observed the Captain; "I don't think they could go very wrong while I was with them."

"Well, then," said the General, "we may consider it decided that you will take charge of them for a month or two on the continent, when the examination is over, and they are both plucked. We can discuss the financial arrangements later on, we shall not quarrel over them. And now let us go and join the ladies, and introduce the youngsters to their new tutor."

Mr. Monkton took Cormack's hand as they passed out of the room, and said, "I am really very grateful to you for promising to look after my ward. He has said so much in your favour that he will be delighted to hear that the arrangement has been concluded."

Mrs. Monkton was charmed with the idea that Captain Cormack, who talked so nicely about the savages and the missionaries, would be at hand to prevent the contamination of Master Caldecott's morals in the wicked foreign places which he was about to visit. And the

worthy lady evinced her satisfaction by getting the Captain all to herself in her favourite corner, and talking to him about Sunday schools and missionary enterprises, until he found it almost impossible to keep awake, and had to keep biting his tongue to prevent yawning. The two youngsters were of course delighted, and perhaps a little amused at the same time.

They left by an early train the next morning; Cormack promising to write and, as a matter of form, exchange references with Mr. Monkton, and, further, to pay another visit to West Hall when the examination was over, and young Hayes and Caldecott free to accompany him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROUGH WEATHER

THE good ship *Gaul* made a fair passage of twenty-one days to Table Bay. Madeira was reached on the fourth day out, and Solomon, Bunton, and Mr. Heath, the American, went ashore and did the lions of Funchal, and, like most ocean travellers who make the mistake of going ashore, instead of taking the beauties of the island for what they are worth from the ship's deck, were very much disappointed with the result of their visit.

I don't know that it is easy to imagine, much less describe, a more beautiful picture than Funchal presents when seen from the deck of an approaching vessel at sunrise. But as one nears the town the prospect becomes much less enchanting; and, if one should be beguiled into going ashore, the first whiff of stale fish, bad fruit, garlic, and maize-leaf cigarettes that comes off the beach, makes one long for the comparative sweetness of the engine-room perfume of the steamer.

Funchal is cramped, ill-paved—with little round cobble-stones—and abominably dirty; in fact, Funchal is Portuguese. Solomon was anxious to see what was to be seen, and Mr. Heath was also bent on sight-

seeing; so Bunton, who was not at all ardent in the search after the picturesque, chartered a bullock-sleigh and a guide, who said he could speak English, but lied, after the manner of guides all over the world, and for a couple of hours the party slid up and down hills, and flew round sharp corners in a most surprising manner, accompanied all the way by a yelling, gesticulating crowd of leprous beggars, who snarled and fought like a pack of jackals over the coppers Bunton threw out in the vain hope of getting rid of them.

The party visited some of the convents and churches, among them the cathedral, chiefly remarkable for dirt and cobwebs, and the English church, the architecture of which amused Mr. Heath immensely. As probably most people know, this is a perfectly circular building, with a large lantern in the centre of the roof, on the glass of which appears a fac-simile of the human eye—the heading of ‘Bell’s Life’ without the *nunquam dormio*. The idea is certainly odd and theatrical, and sensitive people generally pretend to be very much shocked at it.

“As much as to say, ‘None of your winkin’ at the girls, puttin’ buttons in the collectin’ box, or goin’ to sleep in sermon time. I’ve got my eye on you, so look out, or there’ll be trouble sure,’” remarked the American. “Why, if they’d took and put a signboard like that on top of our church in Tombstone, the boys would ‘a been shootin’ at it for drinks before the parson got his voice loose; you bet they would.”

Presently Mr. Heath observed that he was “beginning to weaken on them everlastin’ synagogues,” and proposed an adjournment for luncheon, to enable them to taste

the celebrated vintage of the island on the spot. Their guide piloted them to a rather seedy-looking building, in front of which sat and lolled a number of Portuguese soldiers, all smoking the eternal maize-leaf cigarettes, all talking at once, and apparently making use of exceedingly strong language. Refreshments were ordered through the guide, and the party went up-stairs and found seats on a rickety balcony facing the sea. The wine and etceteras were placed before them. The appearance of the solids condemned them at once, and the guide was invited to dispose of them as he liked, though Mr. Heath was for throwing the contents of the dishes into the yard. Doctor Bunton officiated as the Ganymede of the occasion, and having carefully extracted the cork from a very dusty black bottle, poured out a glass of viscid, pale brown fluid for each of his companions, awaiting their verdict before venturing to taste it himself.

Solomon held his glass to the light, passed it under his nose several times, and finally took a sip. He set it down with a wry face.

Mr. Heath having gone through a similar pantomime, swallowed the contents of his glass at a gulp, and sputtered out, "Great Scott! what's this they're trying to trade off on us? Orange bitters and treacle 'd be real nectar compared to it!"

The guide was called in, and assured them the liquor was Madeira of the finest quality, whereupon they made him drink the whole of it, hoping it would make him ill, but it didn't. A guide can drink anything with impunity.

Then they found their way, much against the guide's inclination, to one of the English hotels—there are two, both excellent in their way, in Funchal—and indemnified themselves for their unpleasant experience of the Madeira vintage by copious libations of imported soda-and-brandy, and returned on board as the *Gaul* was heaving up her anchor, and the crowd of pedlars who infest ships in Funchal harbour were being pitched over the sides by the sailors, and their wares unceremoniously bundled overboard into their boats, and occasionally into the sea.

They had a pleasant fair-weather run down to St. Helena, where the ship was only to remain long enough to land the mails and take those for Table Bay on board.

Three of the missionaries decided to make the ascent of Jacob's ladder, and to call on the English chaplain; and were duly landed, clad in the clerical habiliments which they had manfully stuck to throughout the voyage, in spite of the heat in the tropics.

The agent came on board and brought with him some copies of the 'St. Helena Guardian,' the island chronicle of small beer, and the insular gossip of the past month, in return for which he received some late English papers, and the whole of Cormack's investment in magazines—quite a God-send to a man who had to wait three weeks or a month for his next budget of news from home. The mails came off, half-a-dozen letters and papers for Capetown, a little fruit was taken on board for the saloon passengers, and the ship was ready to start again. The two hours allowed for her stay were

up, and the Captain was looking impatiently up and down Jacob's ladder, through his glass, for the reverend gentlemen who had gone ashore with the intention of climbing it.

"There they are," said he at last, to Bunton and Solomon, who were standing beside him. "Mr. Buntline, tell them to get the anchor up, and blow the whistle—blow it lively. We'll see what our clerical friends' legs are made of."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the second officer, going forward to give the order.

Presently the huge four-mouthed whistle forward of the funnel began to sputter forth a great deal of steam and hot water. "She's clearing her throat," said the Captain. "There she goes!" And there she did go, sure enough! "Hoot, hoot, hoot, hoot!" went rolling over the water from the brazen throat, like the note of some gigantic owl, and "hoot, hoot, hoot!" came echoing back from the clefts in the great red rocks, as if a whole colony of similar owls ashore were mocking the original. Mr. Heath had got his binocular to bear on the three missionaries, who with the skirts of their long black coats flying in the breeze, were tearing down the ladder, terror-stricken lest the ship should go without them. The anchor was coming up, and the steam capstan throwing out clouds of white vapour. "Hoot, hoot!" the buzzer kept going all the time, and the despairing parsons fairly flew down the steep steps of the ladder. They reached the bottom, and a few minutes afterwards were seen racing towards the beach.

"Here they come, hell-bent for election!" cried

Heath. "Captain, couldn't you fire a gun to start them up a bit?"

"Wait a bit," replied the Captain. "Now, Mr. Buntline, is that anchor apeak?"

The officer went forward and presently returned with the information that all was ready for getting under weigh.

"Let them have the gun, then," said Captain Chess-tree; and immediately afterwards, bang went the brass gun on the quarter-deck.

The Captain mounted the bridge, with the third officer at the engine-room telegraph. The little bells in the engine-room sounded merrily, and the screw began to revolve very slowly and sedately.

By this time the three parsons had managed to engage a boat to take them off, and were just starting from the little jetty. The whistle kept hooting away, and presently the uproar was increased by the angry clanging of the steamer's bell.

At length the three unfortunates came alongside, crawled wearily up the accommodation-ladder, and were met by a crowd of grinning passengers and sailors on deck. Their clothes were torn in all directions, and covered with red dust. Two of them had lost their hats; and they had paid the rascally boatmen who brought them off a sovereign a head for rowing them a couple of hundred yards.

The Captain gave the order, full speed ahead, and left the bridge. "Why, gentlemen," he remarked, as he came up to the unfortunate trio, "I thought I should have been obliged to leave you behind. What

a time you did take to come down that ladder, to be sure!"

The three clergymen looked sorrowfully at this man of Belial, for the smiles of the passengers had convinced them that they had been hurried up for sheer devilment, and not because they were really keeping the ship waiting; but they said not a word, as they turned their backs on him and went down the companion.

"Gone to pray for your conversion, Captain," said Miss Blowser, who had been an amused spectator of the whole affair.

"Gone to concoct a complaint to the directors, more likely," laughed the Captain. "Well, I've seen a few people come down Jacob's ladder in a hurry, when we've been whistling them up, and making believe to be in a regular fever to be off, but I never saw anybody travel quicker than those three parsons."

The run to Table Bay was through smooth water and fine weather; and Solomon, who perhaps had special reasons for regretting the termination of the voyage, was quite sorry when Bunton told him one evening that the Captain expected to be in dock by noon next day.

It was blowing a stiff south-easter as the *Gaul* steamed up past the Lion's Head into Table Bay the following morning; and the sand and stones were flying about in a way that made the docks anything but pleasant quarters. Bunton and Solomon, accompanied by Mr. Heath, who had become quite an ally of theirs, got away from the ship as soon as they could, and took up their abode temporarily at a large hotel on the parade, facing the railway station.

After lunch, or tiffin as it is invariably called in South Africa,—the term being a relic of the palmy days when the Cape was the half-way house to India, and the Suez Canal and P. and O. steamers not thought of,—Solomon and the American undertook a voyage of discovery, leaving Bunton to enjoy his cigar, and write a letter to Cormack by the out-going mail.

Mr. Heath presently discovered an American restaurant, kept by a real thoroughbred Yankee, and his potations of Bourbon whiskey at this establishment, on the evening of his arrival in Capetown, had probably a good deal to do with the remarkably sound sleep he enjoyed that night, and still more to say to the awful headache with which he awoke next morning.

The three rose early and strolled down to the docks and back, in search of an appetite for breakfast; but the American felt so shaky and queer that he had to doctor himself up with three or four stiff cocktails before he could face the table. Doctor Bunton offered to get a mixture made up for him at a chemist's, which would straighten him up and steady his nerves, without making him half intoxicated again at the same time; but Heath had a noble contempt for doctor's stuff, and preferred his own prescription. They sat together at the end of a long table at breakfast, Heath opposite Bunton and Solomon. The various tables were all fully occupied, and the *habitués* of the house, principally young clerks in stores and government offices, who were near our three friends—I mean mutual friends, not the reader's—stared, after the manner of the courteous Anglo-Saxon, wherever you may happen across him.

Heath ordered some curried fowl, not because he liked it, for he didn't; but because he had his doubts about the advisability of attempting to use a knife in the then delicate state of his nerves. He seized a piece of fowl with his fork, and after looking round stealthily to assure himself that he was not being watched, endeavoured to convey it to his mouth. It was of no use; his left hand took command, and went over his shoulder, with the result that he very nearly harpooned a waiter who was standing behind his chair. The waiter started back; and comprehending what was the matter, began making telegraphic signs to his fellows, all of whom were soon giggling at the unfortunate American's expense.

He shifted his fork to his right hand, and made another attempt to land his mouthful.

This time he ran the sharp prongs of the fork into his cheek, and dropped it, and said "Damn it" gently, so as not to attract attention. He then picked the fork up, after dropping it again twice, and put it down on his plate, making a tremendous clatter in so doing, and had a try with his spoon. With the greatest difficulty he scooped up a few grains of rice, steadied his arm by powerfully contracting the muscles, and was just making a frantic dash at his mouth, when a dapper little man on the opposite side of the table said,—

"You don't seem to be enjoying your breakfast, sir."

The words were not fairly uttered before Heath's spoon flew over his back on to the floor. He rose and steadied himself on the back of the chair, his face scarlet with shame and passion, and glaring savagely at the

man who had spoken. At length he managed to speak. "In America, sir, no *gentleman* eats breakfast!" he sputtered, and left the room unsteadily.

Bunton, who had watched the whole performance without appearing to do so, turned to the man who had addressed Heath, and said,—

"Don't take any notice of him, sir: there's nothing much the matter beyond a slight touch of locomotor-ataxy—the 'jumps,' you know. I'm afraid there must be some very bad whiskey in Capetown."

There was a general laugh at the doctor's explanation, for most Capetown young men know by experience what the "jumps" are; though I can't say I ever saw them throw the plated ware about the breakfast-table when suffering from that excessively inconvenient disorder.

Solomon and Bunton finished their breakfast, and adjourned to the bar to obtain some information regarding the several routes to the Diamond Fields. Here they found Heath indulging in strong whiskey and water, and, if possible, stronger language. He was leaning over the bar one minute, jerking himself up to his full height the next, and cursing everybody and everything in Capetown and out of it, with an impartial volubility that kept the barman in a perpetual roar of laughter.

Bunton went up to the latter, and whispered to him, "Don't laugh at him, you idiot; don't you see the man is on the verge of D. T.? Help me to coax him up to bed, and I'll give him something to keep him quiet. He's dangerous as he is now." Then he approached

Heath, and, keeping his penetrating black eyes firmly fixed upon his, said,—“Come up-stairs and lie down for an hour or two, Heath; the sun has affected your head this morning.”

“Sun to blazes!” roared Heath; “who cares for the sun! I’m goin’ to enjoy myself, you bet your life. Come, dance!”

“Thanks, no, I don’t care about dancing so early,” said Bunton, perfectly cool, and advancing on Heath, who retreated, shamblingly, backward. “Come along up-stairs with me, and don’t make a fool of yourself,” coaxed the doctor.

Heath turned, and with a run and a tremendous spring landed on a table in one of the corners of the room, making it stagger again with the shock. In a second he whipped out his revolver, and covering Bunton—his hand was steady enough now from excitement—he yelled, “You won’t dance, won’t you? By —— you’ve got to dance! now then, step it out, or I’ll shoot the heels off’n your everlastin’ boots!”

The bar was cleared in a moment. The barman ducked beneath the counter; Solomon jumped out of the window on to the stoep; and the loungers who had come in from the breakfast-table retreated hastily by the door, and came round to look through the windows.

The doctor stood alone, facing Heath, with his back against the bar and his hands in his pockets. “Well, why don’t you shoot then, you contemptible, drunken cur? I am not going to dance, and I am not frightened of you. Shoot away!” and he laughed mockingly.

Heath stared at him stupidly for a minute or two,

and then threw his pistol on the floor and slid off the table.

"Doctor, I—I—I ask your pardon ; it's the blasted whiskey that wants to shoot. Take me to bed, please."

Bunton picked up the revolver, and took Heath's arm up-stairs ; where, in a few minutes, he had him safe in bed with a powerful sedative inside him. When he returned to the bar he was received with quite a furore of congratulation on the pluck he had exhibited.

"Why, good God, man," said a bystander, "he had you fairly covered with his pistol. If he'd pulled the trigger, he must have sent a bullet through you."

"He might have done so, certainly," assented the little doctor ; "but, you see, I wasn't much afraid of it."

"Well, by Jove, I know I should have been in your place."

"No, you wouldn't," said Bunton, smiling.

"But I should, man ! I'd have been over the bar, or out of window the moment he drew his pistol."

"Excuse me, you would have been just as cool as I was," replied Bunton ; "that is, of course, under the same circumstances."

"I'm blessed if I think I should," said the other.

"Look here !" said Bunton, diving into his pocket and producing six cartridges ; "I drew these last night when we put him to bed. There was nothing in his pistol."

"Well, that's the last thing I'd have thought of !" said Solomon ; "but suppose his revolver had been loaded ; what then ?"

"Ah, you see, that would have been quite another

matter. I might have been compelled to reply in kind," and he tapped his hip-pocket suggestively.

This little incident made Bunton exceedingly popular amongst the frequenters of the hotel. The 'Cape Argus' got hold of it, and so did the 'Cape Times.' Then the Dutch paper, 'De Zuid Afrikaan' translated the paragraph from the 'Argus'; and, as is always the case, the story gained as it spread, until it found its way to Kimberley, under a blood-and-thunder heading, "Murderous shooting affray in Capetown," and the little doctor became quite the hero of the hour.

Mr. Heath kept his bed for the two days which the steamer remained in Table Bay; Bunton and Solomon passing the time most agreeably in excursions to Wynberg, Constantia, and Kalk Bay. They had decided to go on to Port Elizabeth, and make that town their starting-point for the Fields, in spite of the arguments of the Capetown folk in favour of the western route. They saw a good deal of the Blowsers during their stay ashore, and it was mainly upon their account that they determined to continue their voyage to the eastern port. The doctor had attained great favour in the eyes of the elder lady, who had promised to interest her husband in his behalf, and secure him introductions to some of his business friends in Kimberley. And Solomon was beginning to speculate upon the advisability of introducing a serious element into his flirtation with the daughter, who had been wondering when he was coming to the point for the last fortnight. As before remarked, Miss Blowser was rather good-looking than otherwise, in spite of the fact that her tresses were of an unpleasantly warm

hue. She was tall and well-formed, and not in the least indebted to her dressmaker for the graceful if rather voluptuous curves of her fine figure. She was totally devoid of education, properly so called; and her only accomplishment was the facility for murdering dance-music on the piano, which has already been chronicled. Solomon, however, like most of his class and race, looked upon matrimony as a purely commercial investment; and from various hints which the young lady had let fall with reference to the paternal possessions, he had almost got to look upon the *ci-devant* grocer's apprentice in the light of a possible father-in-law.

Solomon had improved wonderfully both in manner and appearance since he left Southampton. The sea air and sun had put a healthy colour into his cheeks—in fact he was thoroughly tanned. His eye was clear, and his step springy, and his improved colour gave him a much more manly appearance than he could boast of when first we met him on his return to Petticoat Lane. Being exceedingly observant and an apt mimic, he had found but little difficulty in remodelling his manners and mode of expressing himself upon those of the better-bred people, with whom during the voyage he had been in constant contact, and was now quite capable of behaving like a gentleman in ordinary polite society. To a great extent he had cured himself of his former unnecessarily emphatic style of speech. He had given up wishing he might die, or be struck blind; and instead, contented himself with a comparatively mild reference to his word or his honour—unknown quantities, it is true, but useful in the course of conversation. The doctor

was delighted with the progress made by his *protégé*, who, besides the improvement in his appearance and behaviour, had picked up a considerable amount of general information from his associates, and was now able to converse upon any ordinary topic without fear of putting his foot in it. They had done nothing at the card-table on the trip, for the two Kimberley men were the only people on board who would play for anything worth while, and they persistently fought shy of Solomon. Bunton had learnt a great deal about the Diamond Fields from people he met in Capetown, and prophesied that he and Solomon would have no difficulty in accumulating money there, and both he and his friend were in high spirits at this enticing prospect.

Heath was anxious to travel up with them to Kimberley, and had on several occasions suggested to Bunton that they should "go in" together, offering to invest whatever amount the other would cover by little sums. But Bunton, though he could not fail to recognize the fact that Heath was a shrewd, quick-witted, unscrupulous fellow, had grown distrustful of him since the revolver episode, and had confided to Solomon his resolve to have nothing to do with him in business.

The *Gaul* left Capetown docks in the teeth of a furious south-easter, and had a tremendously rough passage up the coast. Having discharged a large quantity of cargo at Capetown the ship was very light, and knocked about to such an extent that it was utterly impossible to maintain one's footing on deck; while the meals in the saloon partook more of the nature of picnics under difficulties than anything else. The sea smashed in the

saloon skylights, and deluged the whole of the state-rooms on the main-deck, making things wretchedly uncomfortable for the unfortunate first-class passengers, and spoiling much of their baggage.

Solomon, who had no idea that waves ever reached the gigantic proportions of the seas off the Cape of Good Hope coast, felt his heart rise in his throat every time one of the monstrous rollers, whose crest towered high above the steamer's lower yards, threatened to engulf the ship, but somehow slid away harmlessly under her keel. Every now and then a huge green sea would come over the bows and break on deck, sending hundreds of tons of water aft, and carrying death and destruction into the poultry-crates and sheep-pens. The sea increased to such an extent that it became necessary to slow the engines so as only just to keep the vessel moving. Battens were fixed over the skylights, and everything made what sailors call snug, which is just the opposite to what a landsman understands by the term.

Lamps were lit in the saloon, from which the light of day was almost wholly excluded by dead-lights, battens, and iron blinds; the water-tight bulkhead doors were all closed. The missionaries and their wives gave themselves up for lost, and behaved in the most childish manner, asking questions which no one could possibly answer; the women screaming, and the men green with fright. Heath had taken a bottle of whiskey into his cabin, and having pretty well emptied it, was in a blissful state of oblivion as to what was going on around him. The two Kimberley men were sitting, or rather lying, on the saloon-deck, under one of the lamps,

playing cards, having been drowned out of the smoking-room. Mrs. Blowser was lying, drenched to the skin, and shivering with terror, in her cabin, calling vainly for her daughter, whose fears Solomon was endeavouring to calm in the ladies' saloon—where, of course, he had no business to be. And Doctor Bunton, who knew by experience the pleasures of being battened down, was sitting in the chart-room, as dry as a toast, and chatting with Captain Chesstree over their cigars and accompaniments.

Bunton and Solomon's cabin had suffered but little from inundation, thanks to the protection afforded by a water-tight iron door at the forward end of the alley-way in which it was situated; but the smoking-room windows had all been stove in, and the place was afloat. The first night out from Capetown was the roughest weather they had yet experienced; most of the passengers were afraid to go to bed, though they wouldn't have confessed it, and slopped about in the wet and misery of the saloon till morning. There was no attempt at providing dinner; people managed to dispose of sandwiches and biscuits, if they were hungry; and a few of the male passengers performed some extraordinary feats in balancing themselves and the contents of their glasses at the bar. Bunton, who was too old a sailor to be kept out of his bunk by a gale of wind, turned in, under difficulties, about eleven o'clock. Solomon's absence from the cabin did not trouble him, as he concluded he was amongst the others in the saloon, and unwilling to face the seas that were continually breaking on deck.

Meanwhile Solomon was getting tired of his *tête-à-tête*. Several times he had asked Miss Blowser to let him assist her to her mother's cabin, but the fair Fanny was terribly frightened, and would not make the effort. They were in almost complete darkness; for, in the confusion, the stewardess had neglected to light the lamp in the ladies' saloon. There was a dim glimmer through the louvres, and over the transoms, from the lights in the passages on each side, but they could not distinguish each other's faces. Miss Fanny was lying on the couch, and Solomon kneeling beside her, with his face touching hers on the pillow, and clasping her tight in his arms. He had kissed and soothed her until he began to grow weary of such superfluity of spooning. His knees ached, his arms were tired, and every now and then, when the ship lurched more viciously than usual, their heads bumped together, and Solomon began to think the lady's cranium must be having the best of it. He was also hungry and thirsty, and dying for a smoke. A man under these circumstances is very likely to prematurely wreck a flirtation, if his partner in the amusement has not the sense to let him off duty for awhile. At length Solomon rose and found his way to the door, and opened it after considerable difficulty, which was due to the fact that the ship was rolling so heavily, that at one minute the door was apparently where the ceiling ought to be, and the next had changed places with the floor.

He managed to reach the saloon, after bumping several times against the sides of the passage, and found it converted into a make-shift dormitory. It was past

ten o'clock. Supporting himself by means of the iron pillars, of which there was a row on either side of the saloon, Solomon at length reached the bar. The glass and crockery flying about in the pantry, the creaking of the wood-work, and the hundreds of other noises that accompany a storm at sea, combined to make such a din that it was some seconds before Solomon could make the barman understand that he wanted a brandy-and-soda. A heavy lurch caused him to spill more than half of it; so he had another, with a small soda this time. Then he screamed to the barman to know what he thought of the weather. And the barman bellowed back that the old ship was having a jolly good dusting, and no mistake. Solomon enjoyed that second brandy-and-soda amazingly. He had never found making love such thirsty work before. He began to wish he was a tank.

The barman said that south-east gales usually lasted from two to four days, and were commonly followed by a north-wester. They might have to lie in Algoa Bay for a day or two before they could land. Solomon yelled that the prospect of doing so was not enticing, and ordered another soda-and-brandy to drink himself better luck. Then the barman went on to tell him, by means of a combination of shouting and dumb show, of the tremendous south-easter in September, 1869, when out of fourteen ships in Algoa Bay—which sailors, by the way, invariably insist in calling *Aligo* Bay—only two, the *Cape City* and the *Turkish Empire*, rode out the gale; and how the *Turkish Empire* was so rotten that you could stick a penknife through her, and was expected every minute to founder at her anchors.

Solomon found this information extremely interesting, so much so, in fact, that he forgot that he had already had three brandy-and-sodas, and ordered another. The barman looked a little astonished, but, being accustomed to observe ship's discipline and obey orders, he dispensed the mixture. Now I have frequently noticed that the gentlemen who practise at the bar on board the Union steamships are particularly liberal in their ideas concerning the ratio of alcohol calculated to satisfactorily neutralize a given quantity of aerated water. When you ask them for a brandy-and-soda they give you brandy-and-soda, and not soda-and-brandy. And ship's tumblers, being made with a very broad bottom, for purposes of stability, are exceedingly apt to deceive people like Solomon Davis, who are only accustomed to the ordinary shaped glasses in use ashore. Thus it came to pass that after having absorbed his fourth edition of the seductive fluid, Solomon began to feel as if he were making too much steam.

Bunton was safely out of the way ; Mrs. Blowser was either asleep or at any rate too ill and frightened to leave her cabin ; the stewardess was busy attending to the other ladies, and Fanny was in the ladies' saloon, and the dark. Fanny was an agreeable companion, and Solomon forgot all about decorum and the young lady's reputation, and determined to return to the ladies' saloon, and make the most of her society.

His progress through the main saloon was not effected without sundry collisions with the pillars and chairs ; but he managed to get through it, and into the passage on the port side, after some trouble. The doors in this

passage were all alike. Solomon seized the handle of the one which he imagined belonged to the ladies' saloon, and turned it. Just as he did so, the ship gave a lurch to port that laid her almost on her beam ends, and shifted everything movable on the saloon deck, with a crash that would have roused the seven sleepers. Solomon shot head-first into the cabin, the door of which he had opened, as if propelled by a catapult, and alighted in a heap on the top of two missionaries, who had simultaneously exchanged their bunks for the deck in a very painful and alarming manner. It was almost dark, and the three struggled for some minutes with each other and the bed-clothes which enveloped them before they could get loose. The ship had not recovered herself, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Solomon managed to climb up the deck out of the cabin, leaving its two inmates to their own devices.

The people in the saloon were holding on to chair and table legs, the women screaming with fright, and most of the men too terrified themselves to think of attempting to assuage their fears.

The two Kimberley men, who were accustomed to rough weather, and knew that there was very little actual cause for alarm, had been awakened by the noise, and were sitting on one of the tables, each with an arm round a stanchion, dividing their attention between a bottle of whiskey and the scene around them.

Solomon leaned against the doorway, surveying this state of things for a few moments. Presently a piercing shriek sounded from aft. He recognized Fanny's voice at once, and following the sound, reached the door of the

ladies' saloon, and entered—that is to say, he crawled in upon all-fours. The door opened inwards, and closed of itself with a bang. Fanny, who was lying huddled up in a heap on the floor, under a small table which stood in the centre of the cabin, screamed at the noise, and thus enabled Solomon to find her.

“Oh, Solomon, I thought you were never coming,” she said reproachfully, as he came alongside, and passed his arm round her.

“Fanny darling, I assure you I couldn't get back before. The decks are all up in the air, and I broke nearly every bone in my body coming through the saloon. Then I went head-over-heels into one of those missionaries' cabins, and knocked all the religion out of the two that I left struggling on the floor. The saloon's full of water, and the women there are screaming their back hair off. But there's no danger. These big ships never come to grief unless they hit up against a rock or something of that kind.”

The ship had righted, but was still rolling heavily, and the floor was decidedly the easiest place to maintain one's position on. Solomon had one arm round the leg of the table, and the other round Miss Fanny's shoulders. As the ship rolled, first to one side and then to the other, so Solomon and the young lady rolled also, until they were brought up by the table leg with a tug which wrenched Solomon's arm almost out of the socket.

To improve matters, the water on the floor kept washing from one side of the saloon to the other ; while a footstool and some feminine properties in the shape of

work-boxes, and so on, had got adrift, and every now and then collided with the unfortunate pair on the floor, in their erratic career about the cabin.

At last Solomon could stand it no longer. He groped his way on his hands and knees to the couch, near which he picked up a shawl which had fallen off it when Fanny was thrown on the floor. Then with great difficulty he persuaded her to lie down on the couch, a feat which took some time to accomplish, and fastened her to it as tight as he could by passing the shawl round her waist and bringing it over the back of the sofa. The idea was good, but Solomon's knots were not reliable, and the first heavy roll sent Miss Fanny on to the floor again with a bump which would have sent most young ladies into a faint on the spot. He meant to use that shawl, however; and, passing it round the table leg, he tied it as tight round the young lady's waist as she would let him, remarking, "I don't think you'll get out of that; and if you do there's nowhere for you to fall to."

To make everything safe he passed his handkerchief round her knees, and knotted it fast to the other leg of the table. Then he got the cushion off the couch, and placed it under her head; and seeing that he could think of nothing more that he could do for her comfort, he appropriated a share of the sofa cushion, and suggested that the best thing she could do would be to go to sleep. The poor girl was thoroughly tired and worn out with fright, and it was not many minutes before her regular breathing told Solomon that she was in a fair way to act upon his advice. Fastened as she now was, the motion of the ship disturbed her comparatively little, and she

was too wet and weary to take notice of the water which kept washing against her.

Solomon called her gently several times, but received no answer ; then he bent over and kissed her cheek ; and as he was beginning to feel uncommonly sleepy himself—and no wonder, considering the brandy he had consumed—he slipped his arm under Fanny, so as to take advantage of her being lashed to the table to steady himself, and in a few minutes was sleeping beside her as soundly if not as innocently as she was.

CHAPTER IX.

PORT ELIZABETH

THE gale moderated rapidly towards daybreak, and when the sun put his red face out of his morning bath, there was scarcely a breath of air stirring. There was of course a very heavy swell running, but without the wind to drive it, there was no fear of the ship being pooped, as she had been several times during the night. The battens were taken off the saloon skylights, and everything, above and below, put straight. The doctor and the Captain went round and inquired how the passengers had enjoyed themselves, and chaffed them good-humouredly about their fears ; though, as a matter of fact, Captain Chesstree had passed a sufficiently anxious hour or two, lashed to the weather side of the bridge, himself.

Having gone through the saloon and forward state-rooms, the Captain proceeded to the ladies' saloon, at the door of which he knocked discreetly. Obtaining no answer he concluded it was untenanted, but force of habit impelled him to turn the handle and look in. He started back with an exclamation ; but seeing the doctor immediately behind him, opened the door again, entered, and locked it instantly behind him.

The sight that met his eyes was certainly a strange one, and at first the worthy skipper felt very much inclined to put himself into a furious passion. However, he reflected that no one else could have seen what had so astounded him, and at length his features relaxed into a grin, the breadth of which would have done no dishonour to a cat of Cheshire breed and education. He locked the door on the other side of the saloon, and stood staring at the sleeping pair at his feet for some minutes, as if loth to awaken them. However, the scandal must be averted if possible, and he leant over Solomon and gently pinched his nose. That young gentleman snorted once or twice, and then awoke with a tremendous start, and sat up staring about him, as if wondering where he was.

"Good morning, Mr. Davis," said the Captain, laughing; "are you rehearsing for a new version of Paul and Virginia? Look here, you young scamp, the sooner you get out of this the better; we shall have all the old women up in arms if they hear of this escapade. No, never mind explaining now. I dare say it's all right enough, though it looks funny, to say the least of it. Come along; wait till I see whether the coast's clear, and then be off out of this, and not a word to any one."

The Captain unlocked one of the doors, put his head out, and then pushed Solomon into the passage, locking the door behind him. Then he knelt down and unfastened the shawl and handkerchief which bound Miss Fanny to the table, and lifted her, still sleeping, and laid her on the couch. He put Solomon's handkerchief in

his pocket, congratulating himself on his presence of mind in remembering to ascertain whose name it bore. He was just turning to leave the cabin when Fanny opened her eyes, and catching sight of him prepared to scream. He gently put his hand over her mouth, saying, "Don't scream, my dear, I implore you. It's all right; nobody saw him but me." Then he sat down beside her while she told him how she had been frightened almost to death, and how Solomon had wanted her to go to her cabin, but she was afraid to make the attempt; how he had made her as comfortable as he could, and watched by her all night, till at last they both fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

"Well, my dear, don't worry about it. It was a most providential thing that I happened to be the first and only person to catch sight of you fast asleep in your protector's arms. You've no idea how loving you looked; I was quite sorry to wake you. If anybody else had come in, there would have been a nice to-do and no mistake. However, all's well that ends well; I'm as silent as the grave, and I think you may trust young Davis; I like the lad myself. Now mind you never mention last night's proceedings to a soul."

She promised, willingly enough; for Captain Chess-tree's remarks had thrown a new light on the situation, and Fanny was now thoroughly frightened.

"All you have to say is that you have been here all night alone, and you can abuse the stewardess for not coming to see after you. I shall give her a good blowing up myself. I'll send her to you at once," said Captain Chesstree, and left the cabin.

Solomon made his way on deck, where he soon encountered Bunton, who asked him where and how he had spent the night.

"Why, down in the saloon," replied Solomon. "I couldn't get up on deck because the companion door was locked, and the sea seemed to be coming over so much that I didn't care about asking any one to open it for me. What a frightful night it was! Everything was swamped in the saloon, and the women did nothing but scream the whole night long. I feel seedy this morning; let's go and have a reviver."

"Very well, but come into the smoking-room, and we'll get the skipper to join us; he's been up all night, and must be thoroughly knocked up."

Captain Chesstree consented to break through his rule of not indulging before breakfast, on this occasion only, at the urgent entreaty of the doctor and Solomon; and the three disposed of a couple of bottles of dry champagne, very much to their own satisfaction, the Captain whispering to Solomon, "To the health of the sleeping beauty," as he raised his glass.

Bunton and Solomon then went down to the saloon to see how the commissariat was progressing, for both were as hungry as sharks, and the Captain, making Solomon a sign to hold his tongue, vanished into his own quarters.

Breakfast was partaken of under considerable difficulties by the few gentlemen passengers who showed at table. In spite of the fiddles, the plates and dishes could not be persuaded to remain on the cloth; and the only possible way of drinking tea and coffee was by

holding one's cup and balancing it in one hand, and hanging on to the table with the other.

Solomon was fuming to be able to get away to the charming Fanny ; but Bunton, who seemed to divine his wish, determined to keep him where he was, and take advantage of the fact that they were alone, and not likely to be interrupted, to have a little serious conversation with his *protégé*. Solomon had already given the doctor an outline of his early history, suppressing nothing except one or two of the shadier transactions in which he had been engaged. He felt it would be useless and foolish of him to attempt to lie to Bunton about his origin and early experiences. And Bunton knew that what Solomon had told him was, in the main, a statement of facts ; and feeling sure of this, his confidence in his young friend was practically unbounded. After a long discussion as to their plans when they reached the Diamond Fields, the doctor turned the conversation to the Blowers, and asked Solomon seriously whether there were anything more than a mere steamboat flirtation between him and the young lady. Solomon seemed not to relish the question at first ; but on Bunton's reminding him that it was quite as much a matter of business as of sentiment, he replied that he hardly knew himself. "I think she likes me, you know ; in fact, if she doesn't she's the most extraordinary young woman that ever I came across. I suppose I like her too. She's handsome, and clever, I think, don't you ?"

"Handsome, decidedly ; clever, I hope not, for your sake. Clever women are the devil," replied the doctor, as if he meant it.

"Well, perhaps not so very clever," said Solomon, "but smart, knows what she's about, got her head screwed on straight ; you know what I mean."

"Yes ; I fancy for a colonial born girl, Miss Blowser has considerable experience of the ways of the world," answered Bunton.

"But Fanny was at school in England, though she was born out here," objected Solomon.

"Oh, that's what it's come to already, eh? Fanny! By Jove, my boy, you don't allow the grass to grow under your feet! Fanny! Well, I'm delighted with your impudence," and the doctor patted Solomon on the back.

Having, as he thought, discovered how the land lay in this direction, Bunton allowed the subject to drop, much to Solomon's relief. His unwillingness to discuss the topic, however, did not arise from the shyness which usually accompanies the tender passion, and for which Bunton gave him credit. Solomon had been cogitating the situation with regard to Miss Blowser, and more especially the events of the previous night, but not by any means from a matrimonial point of view. That aspect of the case troubled him very little. Her beauty had excited his passion, and he found her society most agreeable. But his mercenary nature led him to take a more materialistic view of the position. It did not trouble his elastic conscience in the least that money acquired by trading on the fears of a young, and, as compared with himself, ignorant girl, might be regarded by honourable people as an exceptionally filthy description of filthy lucre. The question of matrimony he

regarded as a side issue, which might be conveniently deferred for future consideration. A scandal was nothing to him, but would be everything to Miss Blowser and her family, and he meant to work this fact, as he would have expressed it himself, for all it was worth.

It was late in the afternoon before Miss Blowser ventured out of her cabin. Solomon met her in the saloon, and they adjourned to the music-gallery above, where they were not likely to be interrupted. Fanny at first seemed inclined to be distant, and ignored his allusions to what had occurred the previous night. Solomon, however, was not to be snubbed so easily ; and the conversation gradually became unrestrained and affectionate in tone. The Captain, Fanny informed him, had read her a terrible lecture on her folly and want of circumspection, and told her that if ever the truth were to come out nothing could possibly save her reputation.

"But then, no one but he and you know that I was so stupid ; and I am sure we can trust Captain Chesstree, can we not ?" she asked, pleadingly ; "and besides, I was frightened out of my senses, and never thought what I was doing."

Solomon assured her that there was no need for apprehension as far as concerned the Captain, and supposing everything were discovered, what could people say ?

"I don't know, I'm sure, what they would say, but Captain Chesstree declared if it were found out that I could never hold up my head again."

"Nonsense, Fanny, he's only trying to frighten you. Did your mother ask you where you were last night ?"

"Oh no. Ma's so ill that she never thought about

any one but herself. But I'm afraid one of those missionary women suspects something. She scowled at me just now, and tossed her head in the air as if I were something unspeakably wicked. It isn't pleasant to be treated like that, when you know that you have nothing very bad to be ashamed of. I hate that woman. Well, we shall land in a few hours, and then, I suppose, you will forget all about me, though you did not say so last night."

"I shall forget nothing, least of all last night," said Solomon, drawing her yielding figure tenderly towards him, and kissing her, regardless of the fact that several of the passengers were standing close to the entrance.

"Oh, Solomon, don't, pray don't; suppose one of those people should look round."

"It's all right, dear; nobody looked round last night," replied he, laughing.

"Did the Captain give you back your handkerchief," she asked presently; "do you know you tied me so tight to the table that I am covered with bruises?"

Solomon replied that he had not received the handkerchief, but would ask the Captain for it.

The Captain handed over the handkerchief when Solomon asked him for it, later in the day, remarking that he ought to keep it in a glass case in remembrance of the use that had been made of it, and that if he liked he would make him a present of the table-leg to keep it company.

Late on the second night out from Table Bay, St. Francis light was sighted; and when Solomon and

Bunton woke the next morning, the steamer was at anchor in Algoa Bay.

About nine o'clock a small steam launch, crowded with people, came alongside. Fanny, who was leaning over the bulwarks, holding Solomon's hand tight under her cloak, pointed out her father to him, a gentleman of rather above the middle height, inclined to corpulence, with a very red and puffy countenance, and slight, scrubby, grey whiskers, which met under his chin. He looked about fifty years of age, and every inch a grocer. In a few minutes he was on deck, and having embraced his wife in the most liberal manner, to the great edification of the bystanders, was about to favour his daughter in a similar way, when she stopped him with, "No, thanks, pa; I've a bad headache, and daren't risk one of your bear hugs." She kissed his coarse, shiny face dutifully enough, however.

Mrs. Blowser presently introduced her husband to Bunton and Solomon, who, she informed him, had both been exceedingly attentive on the voyage.

"Most 'appy to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said he, bowing and rubbing his fat paws together in the orthodox grocer style. "Very keind of you, I'm sure, to look after my wife and darter on the vyge. Womin is so 'elpless when hunaccompanied by their 'usbands. I 'ope you will give me the pleasure of your company at my 'ouse on the 'ill, when we get ashore. Lovely mornin', isn't it? A trifle 'ot, but nothin' to what we 'ave it in the summer. Still, I think it's a'most 'ot enough for an excuse. Suppose we see if the bar is open?"

Bunton was rather taken aback at the style of this vulgar old butter-tub, as he denominated Miss Fanny's paternity to Solomon later on ; but he did not care to risk hurting his feelings by refusing ; as for Solomon, he was rather pleased than otherwise to find Mr. Blowser so very commonplace a person, and accepted his invitation with alacrity. The three found their way to the bar, and absorbed their respective proportions of a "three-cornered split," at the expense of Mr. Blowser, who appeared quite unhappy because he could not persuade them to repeat the application.

Presently one of the men from the launch came up, and touching his cap, informed Mr. Blowser that they were waiting for him ; and the whole party, after shaking hands with Captain Chesstree and his officers, went down the accommodation-ladder, took their seats on board the launch, and in a few minutes landed at the jetty steps.

Bunton and Solomon, having declined the pressing invitation of Mr. Blowser to make his residence their head-quarters during their stay in Port Elizabeth, left their portmanteaus at the custom-house at the foot of Jetty Street, and walked up to the 'Phoenix Hotel,' which establishment had been strongly recommended to them by Captain Chesstree and several of the acquaintances they had made at Capetown. After fortifying themselves by partaking of an excellent breakfast, they sallied out, in company with Mr. Heath, who was also putting up at the 'Phoenix,' to have a look at the town.

They were very much struck with the handsome, solid-looking building in Main Street, and the busy air

which pervaded the streets and side-walks. Every one but themselves seemed to be walking against time, except here and there, at street corners, and in front of the banks and other big offices, where little knots of men with papers in their hands were talking excitedly. Tram-cars full of people passed every few minutes; Cape carts, American spiders, and open cabs rattled in and out between the horse-drays, wool-flats, and occasional ox-wagons that formed the heavy traffic. The street was broad and well kept, and the side-walks as well paved as those a Londoner is accustomed to.

"By Jove, this is no slouch of a town, at any rate," exclaimed Heath. "Why, this place could give that dirty, sleepy hole of a Capetown half the game, and beat it in a break!"

"Yes, it certainly seems a very busy place," assented Bunton; "it has quite an English air about it."

"English air to thunder! Why, man, where's your mud, and fog, and filth, and sickly complexions, and bad smells? You can't show me a bit of blue sky to match that (and he pointed upward) in your national ague-patch once in a century, and then it would be a fluke!"

"Well, I must admit that our London atmosphere is none of the clearest," answered the doctor; "but if you had travelled more in the country, instead of poisoning yourself with bad whiskey and late suppers in London, you might be better qualified to give an opinion on the English climate. As for ague-patches, as you call them, the reputation of our fens is sweet compared to that of your Florida swamps—I know what they are from

experience. You're as bad as the Frenchman who never stirs out of Leicester Square for twenty years, and then asserts, as being an unimpeachable authority, that London is a dirty hole. So it is—all that he knows of it. But then, you see, Leicester Square is not London at all, but only a bit of the Paris slums transplanted."

"Have it your own way, doctor. I know you Britishers can whip creation as well as we can; and so long as we don't get tryin' to whip each other, except just at a friendly game of throwin' the hatchet, we shan't be any worse friends. There's some almighty tall blocks in this city, that's a fact. But this here street surveyin' is everlastin' hot work; I'm as dry as a deaf mute at a funeral. There's a saloon yonder; let's liquor!"

They had walked some little distance, and Heath, for once, was right about the sight-seeing being a very thirst-compelling occupation. And so the party adjourned, without any objection from the doctor, to a cosy little bar on the right-hand side of the street, which they found full of people, and apparently doing a roaring business. A round-faced, corpulent individual was flying about behind the counter, with a word for everybody, and handling bottles and decanters so fast that he reminded Solomon of a street performer with the Indian clubs. Heath, Bunton, and Solomon forced their way as gently as they could up to the bar, and the fat man spotted them in a second, and was down on them with a—"Good morning, gentlemen—lovely morning—came in by the train?—off the steamer?—three-cornered split—bottle of beer and three outs—invalid port—sherry and bitters—that's the talk—change,

sir, here you are!" (Talking to other customers, whom he served as fast as he spoke.) "Now, gentlemen, what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Heath ordered the refreshments and paid for them, and the three took up their glasses and moved back from the counter so as to leave more room for fresh-comers, who kept pouring in in a continuous stream.

A tall fair man entered presently, and was greeted by most of those present with a—"Good morning, Major," or, "Hullo, Major, how goes it?"

He nodded in acknowledgment, and marching up to the bar pulled his collar up, extended his shirt-cuffs, and observed majestically, "James, bring me a glass of British beah, damn you. Do you heah?"

"Right you are, Majah," responded the fat man, depositing the liquid demanded on the counter.

The tall man took it up and surveyed it critically for a moment, then he drank it, put the glass down heavily, and said, "Swipes, James!"

Heath found the stranger interesting, and stared at him accordingly. The tall man faced round, and seeing the American's eyes fixed on him, returned the stare with interest, at the same time hitching up his collar and shooting his linen as before. The situation began to become embarrassing. Heath, who was wearing a turn-down collar, carefully proceeded to turn it over and pull it up until it nearly reached his ears; then he shook out about three reefs in his shirt-cuffs, and pulled them forward over his fingers; and finally raised his hat and put it on again, cocked back on one side of his head in exact imitation of the manner in which the tall

man carried his golgotha. Every one in the room was intently watching this dumb show, and wondering what would come of it. The tall man never relinquished his steady stare for a moment, but he looked as if very much puzzled by Heath's manœuvres, and quite at a loss how to take them.

"Air you the mayor of this 'ere city, or the commander-in-chief of the Colonial forces, or recruitin' sergeant for the lunatic asylum, or how?" at length asked Heath, looking as solemn as a whole graveyard full of tombstones.

"Did you er—address yourself to me, sir?" demanded the other pompously, hauling up another inch and a half of shirt-collar from the recesses of his waistcoat.

"Well, I reckon I did take that liberty, your royal highness," replied Heath, putting his chin forward with an exceedingly impudent gesture.

"Then permit me to inform you, sir, that you have been guilty of an unwarrantable piece of impertinence—a gross insult. You are apparently an American, devoid of cultchah and refinement, and it would be childish folly on my part—er, to expect you to comprehend me—er, were I to animadvert upon your insufferable insolence in appropriate terms. D—n your infernal impudence, you cross-eyed, wizen-faced abortion! Take your eyes off me, or by the living Jingo I'll grind every bone in your ugly carcase to powder!"

A general roar of laughter followed this bellicose outburst. Heath, who was luckily in a good humour that morning, looked savage for a minute or two, and then said, laughing, "No offence, stranger, I hope. I'm not

offended a bit. Upon my word, I thought you were the archbishop, or the pope, or some of them old swells. But I see I was mistaken ; you curse just as natural as I do. My name's Heath, from Arizona ; what's yours ? I reckon it's about time we lubricated."

The big man was a little inclined to be huffy and stand on the remnants of his dignity at first ; but he soon found that, short of actual violence, nothing would ruffle the imperturbable American. So he made a virtue of necessity, and introducing himself as Mr. Kirk, accepted Heath's proffered hand, and, as he poetically remarked, assisted in offering a libation on the altar of their nascent friendship.

Mr. Blowser presently came in, his round face beaming with fatuous good humour, and shedding quite a shower of perspiration. He was delighted to hear such flattering opinions of Port Elizabeth from the doctor and Solomon. Heath had button-holed the Major in a corner, and being informed by him that he was sub-editor of a local newspaper, was retailing an entirely new series of his adventures in Arizona for his benefit, beside which the adventures of the celebrated Baron Munchausen paled into the most commonplace insignificance.

It was getting on for eleven o'clock, and Bunton recollected that they had to see their luggage through the customs, so the whole party, including Mr. Kirk, strolled down Jetty Street to the unsightly little iron shed where the modern representative of St. Matthew, who sat at the receipt of custom—and probably cheated both the summer tourists and the revenue of those days,

before he went into the human fishery business—takes toll on dutiable articles from visitors from beyond the seas.

The doctor's Winchester was the only article upon which H. M.'s revenue officers were entitled to levy, for they kept their revolvers in their pockets and said nothing about them, or the ammunition in their port-manteaus, which, thanks to the presence of Mr. Blowser, were passed without being inspected. Bunton was informed that he would have to obtain a certificate from the magistrate to the effect that he was a fit and proper person to be entrusted with fire-arms before the customs authorities could allow him the privilege of paying a sovereign to be permitted to take his rifle away; and wishing to get everything settled at once, the doctor, accompanied by Solomon,—Mr. Blowser was busy clearing his wife's baggage,—proceeded to the magistrate's office; and after waiting some time, was ushered into the presence of that august functionary, who was writing at a desk covered with books and papers.

The doctor and Solomon stood, with their hats in their hands, waiting till it might please the great man to look up. Five minutes passed, and he went on writing as if unconscious of their presence. The doctor coughed gently. No result. He coughed again, louder. No go. Then in desperation he kicked over a chair which stood near him. The magistrate looked up and adjusted his *pincenez*.

"I beg your worship's pardon," said Bunton, "but I was informed at the Custom-House that it would be necessary for me to procure a permit—why, d—n it, there he goes again!"

At the word permit, the great man's head went down again, and he began writing harder than ever. The doctor stared ; and Solomon suggested in a whisper that perhaps they had come to the wrong shop. That was impossible, however, as they had been shown in by a sergeant of police. They waited in silence for another five minutes ; then Bunton began beating a tattoo on the floor with his heel. The magistrate looked up again.

"What, not gone yet? What d' you want, eh? what d' you want?"

"If you please, your worship, they told me at the Custom-House——"

"This isn't the Custom-House, I tell you. Here, Cherry! Cherry! Cherry!" (ringing a hand-bell furiously, at the sound of which a stout police sergeant entered the office), "what d' you mean by bringing people here bothering me with their Custom-House nonsense? Take 'em away! take 'em away! I'm busy." And he went on with his writing again.

The sergeant took them into one of the clerk's offices, got the necessary document made out, and said, "Wait here a minute, gentlemen, I'll get him to sign it," which he did, and Bunton went down to the Customs, paid his sovereign, and got his Winchester ; feeling highly impressed with the dignified manner in which the majesty of his position was upheld by the chief representative of justice in Port Elizabeth.

Mr. Blowser was greatly amused at Bunton's account of his interview with the magistrate, whose hasty temper he attributed to his probably having been afflicted with a bad partner at whist the evening before.

The doctor and Solomon took tiffin with Mr. Blowser, at his 'ouse on the 'ill, as he called it, the magnificence of which and its furniture fairly dazzled Solomon, to whom Cormack's rooms had hitherto appeared the height of luxury. After tiffin Mr. Blowser had to return to the office, as he designated his shop; and Miss Fanny—who, it may be well to mention, was an only child, and accustomed from her childhood to have her own way in everything—volunteered to exhibit the beauties of St. George's Park to her father's guests. Bunton was hot and tired, but too polite to enter an objection to the proposal; and even Solomon, much as he enjoyed the companionship of the lively Fanny, found very little pleasure in dawdling with her round the dazzling white paths and painfully brilliant flower-beds, beneath the scorching rays of the midday sun. For nearly an hour Solomon and Bunton perspired in uncomplaining misery, until even Miss Blowser was fain to admit that she found the heat somewhat trying, and allowed them to escort her home. Coming down White's Road, the gradient of which is about one in twenty, Bunton took a solemn oath that he would never play gooseberry again for Solomon in the daytime.

"Why, that young woman's a regular salamander! You and I were raining perspiration in the most disgusting manner all the time, and she never so much as turned a hair. I wonder how it is, by the way, that women show the effects of heat so much less than men?"

"Well, for one thing, they drink much less than we do," suggested Solomon; "and for another, they plaster

their faces over so thickly with powder that I suppose it is almost impossible for them to perspire at all."

"Well, whatever the cause may be, it's most unpleasant to have to keep mopping every two minutes when one is walking beside a woman whose skin is as dry as a bone, and looks cool, if it isn't so."

"Oh, it isn't so very cool, though," said Solomon.

"How do you know, Mr. Wiseacre?"

"Why, because I kissed her in the conservatory, when you weren't looking, and her cheek was as hot as fire," replied Mr. Davis, laughing.

"Your cheek seems to be cool enough under any circumstances," observed the doctor.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is. I never heard that any of our family were much troubled with modesty."

"All I can say is, take care you don't spoil the advantage you have gained by going too far. I am not such a hypocrite as to attempt to preach morality; but the girl is open-hearted, and, I think, innocent, as women go now-a-days; and it is very evident she trusts you. It would be the blackest bad form to betray her; besides, it would be directly against your own interests, for I have ascertained that her people are very well off."

"Believe me, doctor, it's the pieces I'm after. Mer-shuker isn't trumps yet!" answered Solomon.

"Very well, my dear boy; I'm glad to hear it. But pray do try and break yourself of using that hideous slang."

"It isn't pretty, I know. But Yeddin all talk like that among themselves. However, I don't come it so

strong as I used. I shall manage to drop it altogether before long."

At the 'Phoenix' they found Mr. Heath. He was sitting alone on the window-sill in the bar, amusing himself with a dice-box at a game which he called solo-poker—his right hand against his left. It was not altogether a satisfactory game, because whichever hand won, the player had only one mouth to absorb the stakes; and his flushed face and thick utterance were undeniable evidence that the bar had profited considerably more than he had by his pastime.

"Ah! here you are then," he said, slipping off his perch; "now give an account of yourselves. I've been running this show all to myself for the last three mortal hours. I think it's real mean to go back on a guileless innocent this way."

"I can assure you," answered Bunton, "we would willingly have changed places with you. We had an uncommonly trying time of it, wandering about the Park on the hill. You won't catch me there again in a hurry."

"Well, but what are you going to do with yourselves this evening?" asked Heath; "we can't sit moping here till bed-time. They say there's some sort of a show at the theatre, just across the road, up that hill. What do you say to looking in for an hour or two?"

"Anything will suit me," replied Bunton.

"Let's go by all means," added Solomon.

"That's arranged then. Let's toss who pays for tickets," suggested Heath. They threw the dice, and Heath lost, as the proposer is popularly supposed to do

in nine cases out of ten. After ascertaining that there would be plenty of room, and that they could depend upon getting good seats by paying at the door, the party separated to prepare for dinner. Having finished their post-prandial cigars, they strolled across to the barn, which, to the disgrace of the town, does duty as a theatre in Port Elizabeth—a town of some fifteen thousand inhabitants, who delight to brag of the place as the Liverpool of South Africa. The so-called theatre is a bare iron shed of small dimensions ; there is no attempt at ornament, with the exception of some ghastly daubs on the proscenium ; there is nothing in the shape of a ceiling between the iron roof and the heads of the audience ; the seats are uncomfortable, and the rows so close together that it is almost impossible to pass a person unless he rises ; and the whole place is dirty, dingy, dusty, draughty ; about as dismal a house of the drama as can easily be imagined. The audience, on the occasion of our friends' visit, was so scanty that Bunton suggested they should postpone their attendance till another evening. Heath, however, was bent upon seeing what there was to see, and they entered, and took their seats in the second row of stalls—by courtesy from the orchestra—also a figure of speech.

The illumination of the stage was effected, in a very indifferent manner, by half-a-dozen gas jets, fitted with green-backed reflectors, all of which leaned in different directions, like a mouthful of jagged, ill-shaped teeth. There was a row of American arm-chairs in front of the first row of baize-covered benches that represented the stalls, the occupants of which stared and fidgeted about

so much, talked so loud, and behaved so badly all round, that Dr. Bunton asked a seedy-looking skeleton, who was making a mournful attempt to sell programmes, whether these persons were the representatives of the leading families.

"Them in the chairs, sir? Oh dear no; them's the press—free passes, you know. They're a perfec' nuisance, they are. But we finds it best to take no notice of 'em."

The orchestra presently emerged from a dwarf door under the stage, and took his seat at the piano. He was a curly-headed young man, whose countenance had come to a crisis in the shape of a nose of such enormous dimensions, that it actually interrupted his vision, and caused a diabolical squint, whenever he ventured to bring his eyes to the level of the point of his proboscis. Greetings of a friendly nature having passed between this person and the gentlemen in the chairs, he proceeded to stumble through a combination of scientific discords and chromatic scales, which was rendered still more exasperating by the fact that the instrument was excruciatingly out of tune, while the mechanism rattled and creaked like an ancient mangle. After about five minutes of this torture, which was borne by the majority of the audience with a degree of equanimity which seemed to indicate that they were accustomed to it, a bell rang, and the curtain rose in a succession of spasmodic jerks amidst the customary yells and cat-calls from the gods at the back. A young woman of unprepossessing appearance, clad in a curious nondescript costume, which would fit almost any period of history up to a couple of hundred years ago, was discovered sitting in a shabby arm-chair,

reading the 'Eastern Province Herald' of that morning's date, an anachronism which evoked considerable merriment from the chairs. Presently a very stout man, wearing a grimy artillery uniform about three sizes too small for him, entered through a practicable French window at the back of the scenes, and taking the lady in his arms, proceeded to embrace her, at the imminent risk of bursting the back seam of his tunic.

Heath had been shifting about uneasily for the last ten minutes, and at last turned to Solomon and asked, in a loud whisper:—"Say, d'you feel anything wrong about your legs? Mine feels as if a whole heap of red-hot needles was bein' stuck in 'em."

"Now you speak of it," replied Solomon, "I have noticed an odd sort of sensation."

"So have I," said Bunton; "I think it must be mosquitoes."

"Mosquitoes be shot! they can't get their teeth through cloth, anyhow," said Heath. "I can't stand it any longer; I'm goin' to look!"

And, in spite of the doctor's whispered remonstrance, he deliberately crossed his right leg over his left, and began rolling up the garment that enveloped it.

"I thought so! Fleas! Great snakes! Let's get out of this, boys, before we're eaten up!"

This was, said loud enough for everybody in the vicinity to hear; and, combined with the liberal exhibition of Mr. Heath's right supporter, produced a perfect roar of laughter, which was taken up by the whole house, much to the astonishment of the lady and gentleman on the stage, who stared at each other, as if trying to

discover whether anything connected with their costume had evoked the merriment. The laughter increased as Heath rose, and the gods began to shout "Sit down!" "Turn him out!" &c., in a very vociferous manner.

He faced them. "I'm goin', gentlemen; I'm goin' at once, in a hurry. I can stand a good many things in the way of insects, but I've not been educated sufficiently to enable me to stand a siege of Port Elizabeth fleas. I suppose you are accustomed to them, or bring your own. When I get case-hardened I'll pay this institution another visit. Go on with the music, Mister."

Bunton felt considerably relieved when they reached the door, for he was afraid, if anything like violence were offered to Heath, he might do mischief with his revolver. They returned to the 'Phœnix,' and for the remainder of the evening Solomon and Heath monopolised the billiard table, the doctor looking on, highly delighted with the brilliant performance of his *protégé*.

Bunton had made up his mind to remain at Port Elizabeth for a fortnight or three weeks, so as to enable him to hear from Cormack, whose letters he had requested the post-office people to send on from Capetown, and he determined to devote this period to the obtaining of as much information as possible on the subject of the diamond-fields. He found Mr. Blowser exceedingly useful in this direction; as through him he obtained introductions to several persons who had graduated as diggers in the early days, from whom he secured much valuable intelligence regarding the diamond mining industry.

Solomon spent much of his time in the company of the fair Fanny, and made such advances in the old

gentleman's favour that he endeavoured to dissuade him from accompanying Bunton to Kimberley, and even offered him a clerkship in his office, at the munificent salary of ten pounds a month, with prospects of a speedy increase, in order to induce him to settle in Port Elizabeth. Miss Fanny exerted all her influence in favour of this proposition, and thought Solomon very cruel because he obstinately refused to abandon the doctor. Bunton and he had many conversations on the subject. The doctor left his young friend entirely free to follow his own wishes, but pointed out that the humdrum drudgery of mercantile business was not at all likely to suit him, and that it was quite possible constant companionship might throw an entirely different complexion upon the feelings of Miss Blowser and himself. It might be that he would in time be offered a partnership by Mr. Blowser, and finally step into his shoes altogether; but he doubted whether Solomon would be able to stand the probation which the old gentleman would naturally insist upon before giving him his daughter and a share in his business.

"I know well enough it would never suit me," Solomon admitted; "fancy me cocked up on a high stool, making out invoices and accounts all day long! Why, I couldn't stand it for ten minutes, let alone three or four years, for the sake of the loveliest woman that ever breathed. And ten pounds a month! What could I do with ten pounds a month? I should be robbing the till before I'd been there a week, to pay my washerwoman. No, no; I'll keep out of that temptation, at any rate."

Old Mr. Blowser, urged thereto by his daughter,

whose *penchant* for Solomon he more than suspected and rather encouraged than otherwise, actually so far ignored the traditions of his shop as to offer Solomon twelve, and then fifteen pounds a month, to enter his employment, throwing out, at the same time, certain vague references to a prospective partnership, which he obstinately refused to comprehend. But Solomon had made up his mind on the subject, and thanking Mr. Blowser most profusely for his magnanimous offer, he declined to avail himself of it, on the ground that he had not been brought up to business ; and, further, that he was under such obligations to Bunton that it would be the blackest ingratitude on his part to think of allowing him to undertake the expedition to the Fields alone. If, he said, he found that his hopes of success at Kimberley were unlikely to be realized, he might possibly think of settling in Port Elizabeth ; but his first duty, he considered, was to follow the doctor's fortunes.

These sentiments, Mr. Blowser was forced to admit, were only such as could be expected from so honourable and prepossessing a young man as he believed Mr. Solomon Davis to be, and he complimented him highly upon the expression of them. He told him, also, that if he should not find life on the Diamond Fields to his taste, there would always be a berth open for him in his office, and a room at his disposal at his house ; and then, finding that he had offered all he had to offer, and said all that he could find to say, he invited his son-in-law, that might be, to join him in a drink, an invitation which that young gentleman very graciously accepted.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIELDS

THE next mail from England, which arrived about a week after the *Gaul* had landed her passengers at Port Elizabeth, brought Bunton a long letter from Cormack, containing full particulars of the last meeting of the shareholders and directors of the Blackstone Consolidated Tin Mining Company, Limited, and of the manner in which the writer had bounced the shareholders out of their intention of taking legal proceedings. Then came the news of the fire, and the total destruction of the Company's books and documents of all kinds. Cormack went on to describe his visit to Henley, with all its consequences, and concluded a very cheerful letter by sending his kind regards to Solomon, of whom he said, he expected to hear before long as being indispensable to the doctor. The letter also contained a bank-draft for two hundred pounds, in case of emergencies, the writer explained—an evidence of kindness, or rather of affection, on the part of his old friend, that made the doctor's eyes glisten as he read.

So far all was well, and Bunton told Solomon that now he had heard from the Captain there was no fear of any trouble in connection with the Tin Mining

Company, and that there was no reason to waste more time in Port Elizabeth.

The most direct route to Kimberley from Port Elizabeth, in those days, was that *viâ* Graaff Reinet, Middelburg, Colesberg, Philippolis, Fauresmith and Jacobsdal, the total distance being about four hundred and fifty miles; and by this route Bunton decided to travel. Heath was apprised of his determination, and decided that he had seen as much of Port Elizabeth and its inhabitants as he cared to see, and intimated that he should be glad if the doctor would allow him to travel by the same "shebang" in company with him and Solomon.

Their arrangements were speedily completed. Their heavy baggage was sent by rail to Graaff Reinet, with instructions to the coach agent there to forward it on by ox-waggon to Kimberley; and having booked three passages for themselves by coach, and said adieu to the Blowser family, the genial host of the Phoenix Hotel, and other acquaintances, they took their seats one morning in one of the queer little band-boxes-on-wheels which formerly served as railway carriages on the Cape Government lines, and commenced their first journey in South Africa in earnest.

A run of twenty miles through heavy bush country, with occasional glimpses of the sluggish Zwartkops River, landed them at Uitenhage, whose big trees and cosy old-fashioned houses reminded Bunton of many villages in the old country.

After leaving Uitenhage the train wound its way for miles through a sea of bush, with here and there a farm-

house at some distance from the line, and a few goats and cattle lazily grazing in the openings. The sun beat down on the flimsy roof of the railway carriage, and the impalpable red dust found its way through the windows and ventilators, and got into their clothes, irritating them most uncomfortably.

The delays at the little way stations, where no one got out or in, and there was apparently nothing whatever to stop for, seemed interminably long. The engine-driver and guard, and such of the passengers—of whom there were in all about a dozen—as knew the station-master, generally alighted and had a chat with that official, exchanging the Bay news for the scanty intelligence of his neighbourhood. When there was nothing more to talk about, the guard would say, “Now then, Jumper, let’s get away!” And the passengers would saunter back to their compartments, and Mr. Jumper would mount his foot-plate, and start the train lazily ahead again, without even taking the trouble to blow his whistle.

Once the stoker’s cap fell overboard on to the track, and the train was pulled up, two or three hundred yards further on, while the knight of the shovel walked back, whistling, picked up his property, and strolled up to the locomotive again. There was no unseemly hurry about his mode of progression, and Bunton remarked that the aphorism about man being the slave of time had obviously no application to the employés of the Cape Government railways, whom he cordially admired for their manly independence.

At length the character of the country through which they were travelling began to change, or, rather,

changed almost suddenly. A tremendous pull of some seven miles of one in forty ascending gradient, which made the locomotive cough and grunt like an asthmatic giant getting upstairs, landed them on the top of a vast rolling plain, which appeared as remarkable for its barrenness as the country preceding it had been for the luxuriance of its vegetation. At the next station, the guard informed Bunton that they were now in what is known as the Karroo ; so called from a scrubby stunted bush which in this part of the colony is as a rule almost the sole representative of the vegetable kingdom. This bush at first sight looks as if it contained about as much nourishment for cattle as a bunch of dry twigs, which, indeed, it greatly resembles. But it is wonderful how fat cattle and small stock contrive to become on this food in good seasons ; while in droughts, which are the normal state of things in this part of Cape Colony, the Karroo bush manages to exist itself and support animal life long after all other vegetation has been burnt to a cinder by the pitiless rays of the sun. There is no grass whatever in the Karroo ; but after a heavy rain in spring or early summer, the apparently endless flats blossom into a wealth of many-hued wild flowers, which seem only to take a day or two to grow and blossom, and wither away as quickly as they appeared. They are pretty, delicately-tinted blooms, many of very curious form, but none of them possess the slightest perfume, and the texture of most reminds one of straw paper. They wither as soon as they are plucked.

There had been no rain for months, and as the train got further northward, the Karroo began to assume

a thoroughly burnt-up appearance. The red soil, gaping every few feet into great heat cracks, dotted here and there with little black heaps of cinders, which were all that remained of the plants that had been deluded into showing themselves by the last rain; the scorched leafless clumps of Karroo bush, which looked like so many inverted birch brooms, and crumbled into ashes under the fingers; the hideous red ant-hills, some of which reached three feet and more in height, and might almost have been mistaken for native huts at a distance; and the monotonous line of white-painted, iron telegraph-posts, combined to make the prospect from the railway-carriage windows anything but enlivening. Bunton suggested that they should pull the blinds up, take off their coats and boots, and endeavour to get a nap; and in a few minutes all three were dozing as comfortably as was possible under the circumstances, in the darkened but still stiflingly hot atmosphere.

The train crawled lazily along, now gaining a little in speed as it struck a slight descending grade, and again coming back to its usual leisurely fifteen or eighteen miles an hour as it puffed its way out of the hollow on to the top of another rolling flat. The road was rising steadily, and by the time Mount Stewart, a hundred and twelve miles from Port Elizabeth, was reached, the track was over two thousand feet above the level of the sea. As the train rolled into Mount Stewart station, the ears of the travellers were assailed with strange sounds.

"Bank! Bank! Igh'Olborn! Charing Cross! Strand! Victorier!" repeated over and over again in the exact style of a Cockney omnibus conductor, made them rub

their eyes and wonder where on earth they had got to. Solomon let down the blind and looked out, and was greeted by a hearty laugh from several persons who were standing with their hands in their pockets on the platform.

"Hullo, Tootz, old man, how goes it?" said one of the passengers in the next carriage to a tall fine-looking fellow, the tone of whose reply, "Jolly, thanks; how are you, Mont?" informed Solomon that he was the 'bus conductor.

"Is that you, Tootz, old boy?" asked another man; and presently Tootz—otherwise George L——, and why "Tootz" I have never been able to discover—was shaking hands with everybody on the train, with the exception of our three friends.

Everybody alighted, and an adjournment was made to the hotel about a hundred yards from the station, in spite of the protest of the guard, who asserted that the train had only a minute to stop at Mount Stewart, and was late already.

"Come along, gentlemen, don't trouble yourselves about what he says," said Mr. Tootz to Bunton and his party, who were hesitating whether to leave the station; "the fact is the traffic manager isn't fond of my excellent friend Mr. C—— of the hotel here, and he tries to hurry the trains through so as to prevent his deriving any benefit from them. But we always stop them as long as we like. You ought to see strangers on the night train stare when they hear me sing out 'Bank! Bank!' Nobody goes through here asleep when I am on the platform; and I generally am, eh, C——?"

"Yes, the station's as good as church, theatre, and everything in the shape of amusement rolled into one, to you," replied the gentleman addressed, laughing.

The whole party entered the hotel, and were soon enjoying ice-cold drinks in the comfortable dining-room.

It rather astonished Bunton to be served with soda-water that was so cold that it almost made his teeth chatter, in the heart of the Karroo, where, of course, ice was an impossibility, with the mercury standing at about 155° in the sun, and he asked the proprietor of the hotel how it was managed. In reply he was shown a large frame containing a number of wire racks, each of which held several dozen bottles. The rack stood in a passage, where there was always more or less draught, and the bottles were covered with strips of blanket, which were kept constantly saturated by water dropping slowly from a tap fixed in a cistern overhead. The first tier drained into the second, and so on, a large tray being placed beneath the last tier.

"That is one arrangement," said Mr. C——; "now I'll show you another."

He took the doctor on to the stoep outside, and pointed out a cylindrical canvas bag, about three feet long, hanging directly in the sun's rays, and perspiring very freely. Putting his hand in, he drew out a bottle of claret, which was so cold that Bunton could not resist the temptation, and had the cork drawn at once, just to see if the liquor was as cold as the bottle advertised it to be.

"The hotter the sun is, you see, the faster the water evaporates, and the cooler the liquor becomes," said Mr. C——. "Everybody uses these bags on the Fields ;

and what puzzles me is that people down country don't go in for them. They are quite as efficacious as ice, and don't spoil delicate wines, as in my opinion ice does. And they cost next to nothing."

They returned to the dining-room, and Bunton, hearing that they would not be able to obtain anything respectable in the way of refreshments between Mount Stewart and Graaff Reinet, laid in some commissariat stores, an example which was followed by the other passengers. Presently the guard emerged from the station, and rang a furious peal on a hand-bell.

"Oh, let him ring," said Mr. L——, "he can't go without you; and if you are half-an-hour late, they can easily make it up after you leave Oatlands. They always try to hurry people away from here; at any other station you could keep them waiting an hour without anything being said."

At length they started, and did not leave their seats again till they reached Graaff Reinet, about six o'clock.

At the station, which is some little distance from the town, they found conveyances waiting to take passengers to the different hotels; but finding that most of the others intended to walk, our party, who felt miserably stiff and uncomfortable after that hot twelve hours' railway journey, decided to imitate their example. They had made arrangements to put up for the night at the 'Drosdty Hotel,' as being the starting-point of the Kimberley coaches; and a few minutes' walk along the miraculously dusty streets brought them to that extremely comfortable hostelry. Quite a large company,

including most of their fellow-passengers in the train, sat down to dinner ; after which, Solomon, Bunton, and Heath lit their cigars and undertook a tour of inspection by moonlight, the effect of which upon the white streets and whiter houses was very curious.

Graaff Reinnet is a straggling overgrown village of some six or seven thousand inhabitants, the Dutch element being very strongly represented. It has no pretensions to beauty, either of architecture or surroundings, though its inhabitants, for some incomprehensible reason, have chosen to honour it by the title of the Gem. It is chiefly remarkable for heat, dust, and the contented slothfulness of the majority of its population. The only redeeming feature it can boast of is its fruit, especially its grapes, which are as big as ordinary greengages, though they are not to be compared with English hot-house grapes for flavour.

It was about nine o'clock when our party returned from their stroll, after having succeeded in losing their way half-a-dozen times at least ; and mindful of the fact that the coach was supposed to start at five the next morning, Bunton and Solomon sought their couches at once, leaving Heath, who declared that he was not in the least sleepy, to finish another cigar in the billiard-room.

About a quarter before five, Bunton and his companion were jerked out of their sleep by a tremendous blast on a bugle, delivered just outside their bed-room window,—the hotel, like most houses up country, was a building of only one floor,—and followed by a cry of "Coach !" repeated several times by an individual whose

vocal education had evidently been imparted under the somewhat unfavourable influence of a chronic gale of wind.

"All right, drive on with your coach, we shall be out directly," cried Solomon, through the window ; and in a few minutes he and Bunton were standing on the stoep with the other passengers, cooling their coffee and watching the boys stowing the baggage in the odd-looking vehicle in which they were to pass the next four or five days of their existence. This coach was an American abomination, and a plate on the side of the box supplied the information that its place of manufacture was Concord, New Hampshire. It had seats inside which would comfortably accommodate six moderate-sized people, but which could be made to take twelve, provided the unfortunate inmates would submit to having their knees wedged together, and didn't mind sitting on each other, for the first few miles, till the jolting shook them down into a compact mass. Outside there were seats for six more passengers, but there was room on the roof of the coach for as many as could sit on the sides, with their legs dangling down in front of the places where the windows would have been if the vehicle had been furnished with such luxuries. That it was not so provided was no doubt due to the fact that no glass ever manufactured could have stood the shocks caused by the holes, ruts, rocks, and other obstacles to smooth travelling which are the leading characteristics of the highways of South Africa. The body of the coach had originally been painted bright vermilion, and the wheels, under-carriage, pole, &c. an

equally bright yellow ; but the glory of these pigments had departed ; the vermilion had degenerated into a dusky brick-dust hue, and the yellow had become bleached and soiled into an indefinite drab, which harmonized well with the subdued tone of the body at a distance, but looked very shabby and woebegone when examined at close quarters. The place of windows was supplied by canvas blinds, which rolled up and fitted into straps when not in use, and could be buttoned down tightly so as to make some pretence of excluding the dust. Springs, properly so called, there were none ; but the body of the coach was attached to the under-frame by means of an ingenious combination of huge leather straps, the tension of which was regulated by means of a coupling with screwed ends between the axles. A powerful brake was fitted on the hind wheels, worked by a long foot lever on the driver's right ; and the wheels themselves looked out of all proportion to the height of the body, being somewhere about five feet in diameter.

The horses were presently brought out—eight scraggy, half-starved-looking little brutes—and “spanned in,” as the Cape vernacular has it. The harness was a hybrid arrangement, half American, half Colonial, patched here and there with bits of “riempje”—untanned hide—and totally innocent of any attempt at ornamentation. The driver—a little bright-eyed, grey-headed Bastard, muffled up in an enormous wool comforter, and with a short karee-wood pipe in his mouth, went round taking up a hole here, turning a strap there, and examining the traces. Having satisfied himself that all was right, he marched into the hotel bar, got his way-bill from the

barman, swallowed a tumblerful of neat Cape brandy without winking, and marched back to his coach again.

"All ready, gentlemen ; get on board, please," he said as he mounted the box, took the reins from his assistant, unslung his bugle from the piece of string by which it was suspended from his shoulder, and performed quite a brilliant fantasia upon that exceedingly battered instrument.

There were only three passengers besides our friends, and the six at length succeeded in tumbling into the coach and their seats, through the door and window-spaces, both of which presented an almost equally inconvenient means of ingress.

"All right, August ; go ahead !" said the proprietor of the hotel, fastening the door. "Good morning, gentlemen, wish you a pleasant journey. You are sure of a good breakfast at Christiana."

And away they went up the street, the preposterously long whip cracking like a volley of pistol-shots, the bugle in full blast, and the coach swaying and rocking like a fishing-smack in a cross sea, at a pace of which no one ignorant of Cape horses would have believed their seedy-looking team capable.

At first Solomon found it difficult to keep his seat ; but Heath, who was an old hand at travelling in America, laughed at him, and told him not to sit stiff, and he soon found the benefit of this advice. Bunton had expected nothing better, and the jolting and rolling seemed not to trouble him at all. They passed two or three large stores and Government offices, a church or two, and dozens of flat-roofed, white cottages, mostly

with about an acre of highly-cultivated ground attached to them, and here and there a ragged attempt at a flower-garden in front. Further on the cottages gave place to tumble-down native shanties, which decreased in number as they got out of the town.

Presently one of the strangers looked out and said to Bunton, "Look out for a bump here ; we cross the river, and the drift is a beast."

The driver put on his brake, and the coach began to slide down-hill at an angle which seemed to threaten a complete somersault. Just as Solomon was beginning to feel that he really could not keep his seat any longer, the coach dived into the river-bed, and got on a level keel again. It was by no means a broad drift (ford is, I suppose, the correct word, but somehow sounds awkward), but the sides were steep, and there were more boulders in the road than was altogether convenient for the passage of wheeled carriages. And they were not small boulders either, they varied in dimensions from the size of an ordinary plum-pudding to that of a hogshead. Some of them indeed were almost as big as a house,—not a large house, of course,—but these had been shifted out of the road, so that it was not absolutely necessary for vehicles to travel over them. Solomon, who had never journeyed over anything much rougher than a London street, sang out lustily every time the jolt over a big stone sent his head bang against the roof of the coach, and then forced him to sit down with an emphasis which threatened to telescope his backbone ; but the others allowed themselves to be pitched about like so many sacks of potatoes, and

laughed all the time, as if they rather enjoyed it than otherwise. The actual passage through the drift only occupied a few seconds, impossible though it seemed to Solomon that his extremely painful experiences could be condensed into anything less than a quarter of an hour. The ascent on the further side of the drift seemed to be entirely accomplished on the hind wheels of the coach, which Solomon expected every moment would turn over backwards.

The level road was reached again, however, safely in due course, and then the ascent of the Oudeberg afforded our party an opportunity of reversing the belief they had hitherto expressed, that the scenery of South Africa was flat and tame, and that the so-called mountains were only hillocks.

As the Graaff Reinet Boniface had promised them, they found a capital breakfast awaiting them at Christiana, a farmhouse, hotel, and shop combined, about twelve miles, or two hours, as it is customary to measure distance in the colony, from Graaff Reinet. Here Solomon and his companions were enabled for the first time to examine an ostrich camp and its occupants at close quarters, and were very much amused at the queer antics of a troop of young birds, which one of their fellow-passengers described as "waltzing."

They started, after a delay of an hour or so, and nothing but an occasional halt to change horses, to rest their steeds after a pull up-hill, or to refresh themselves, occurred to break the monotony of the journey until, with bugle blowing and whip cracking, they rattled into the quiet little village of Middelburg, where they were

to pass the night, a couple of hours behind time, and as hungry as hunters.

Five o'clock next morning saw them on the road again. The day passed exactly as the preceding one had done, and about eight o'clock they reached Colesberg, and the welcome hospitality of the 'Phoenix Hotel.' The day had been most oppressively hot, and the dust had entered into their souls, and made them all bad-tempered and horribly uncomfortable. A hot northerly wind had been blowing since noon, and their eyes were inflamed with the heat and dust, their cheeks raw, and their lips blistered and cracked.

The doctor strongly advised Solomon not to perform his ablutions in cold water ; but our hero felt so dusty and miserable, that the first thing he did when he reached his bed-room was to duck his head into the basin, and hold it there until he was in danger of choking. He suffered terribly for this piece of indiscretion. By the time they reached Philippolis for tiffin the next day, Solomon's face was swollen to twice its natural size, and looked as if he were threatened with an attack of erysipelas. They had crossed the Orange River about two hours and a half from Colesberg on a ferry-boat, or *pont*, as Cape Colonists call the huge, unwieldy, flat-bottomed craft, working on chains, which in many cases supply the place of bridges over the rivers. Crossing a river on a pont is tame work enough under ordinary circumstances, but all South African rivers are liable to freshets, which sometimes occur without a moment's warning, and carry away ponts, waggons, oxen, and anything else that may obstruct

their progress. The muddy Orange River was just comfortably full, however, on this occasion, and the coach and span had a rapid and pleasant passage to the Free State shore.

After a short delay at Philippolis, a pretty, clean little town, lying in a hollow and surrounded on three sides by iron-stone hills, and boasting some very neat fruit and flower gardens, the ship of the desert got under way again. The cattle on this section were very poor; and instead of arriving at Fauresmith in time for dinner, as they should have done, it was past ten o'clock as they clattered down the main street of that—at that time—particularly gay and festive township.

The windows of the hotel, a long, low building at the northern end of the town, were ablaze with light, and the rooms into which they opened crowded with people. The passengers walked into the billiard-room and bar, and ordered some refreshment while taking stock of the occupants of the place, and in turn being scanned in no very polite manner by the latter. Two of the coach passengers were men who had business interests at Kimberley, which necessitated their making frequent journeys to and from the Fields. They evidently knew and were known by almost every man in the room; and Bunton, who was a very close observer, wondered at the suspicious glances which were cast upon his fellow-travellers by the persons round the billiard-table and leaning against the bar.

Presently supper was announced by the proprietor, a jovial, pleasant-spoken fellow, and the six travellers followed him into the dining-room, where they found

an imposing collation spread for their edification. The landlord himself attended to them, and soon entered into conversation. Considerable excitement in mining and speculative circles had, he said, been caused by the reported discovery of several very large and perfect diamonds at Jagersfontein, a diamond mine about seven miles from Fauresmith. Kimberley folk did not believe in the genuineness of these finds, but the landlord of the hotel waxed quite eloquent in their praise. He had seen and handled several of them, and asserted that no such magnificent gems had ever come out of either of the Griqualand West mines.

After supper the party went out and sat on the stoep, enjoying their cigars in the comparatively cool air beneath the verandah. It grew very late—long past midnight—and still the rattle of the dice and the click of the billiard-balls resounded from the open windows. A waiter happened to come out of the bar for a breath of fresh air presently. Bunton asked him what time they usually closed the hotel.

"Well, sir, we ain't over particular about closing at all just now. Business is too brisk, and there's no law about closing hours in the Free State. The Landdrost here is rather a fussy old gent—that's the Court House right opposite—and he don't like to hear the billiard-balls going on Sundays; but barring the billiard-room, it's more than a month since any part of the hotel was closed for as much as half-an-hour. But your rooms are over in the new building, gentlemen, and the row here will not keep you from sleeping."

"A nice place to live in, I don't think," said Heath,

as they rose and followed the waiter across the street ; "why, it must be as lively, on a small scale, as Tombstone used to be. Do you ever have any shooting here?" he asked the waiter.

"Oh yes, sir ; the gentlemen often makes up hunting-parties, and goes off camping for a week or so."

"No, no ! I mean do they ever get to burning powder over their cards?"

"Lord, no, sir ; not they. Them sort of people never draws blood, unless it's on the quiet like, in the dark. They curses, and shouts, and goes on awful when they lose, but it never comes to nothing serious. They're all too frightened of each other. Good night, gentlemen."

They were on the road again before six o'clock the next morning, and a monotonous drag over a seemingly endless succession of barren, sandy flats brought them to the miserable little village of Jacobsdal, where they arrived about five in the afternoon, covered with dust, hot, thirsty, dirty, and bad-tempered. They had a wretched meal, consisting of dry goat chops and the inevitable sardines, washed down with tepid bottled beer—the coffee was impossible—and turned in early. But they were glad enough to turn out again before they had been many minutes in bed, and leave their myriad tormentors in undisturbed possession of their couches. They passed the hours miserably enough, walking up and down the otherwise deserted streets, or taking short snatches of troubled and unrefreshing slumber on the hard wooden benches in front of the hotel, until morning began to ring the curtain up over the flat and uninviting landscape, and made them wish

more than ever to shake off the dust of their feet on the place and its inhabitants.

"Well, I've struck some daylight horrors among the deserted minin' camps in some of our Western States," said Heath, "but if this place don't lay over anything I've ever lit on in the way of human kennels, why, I'll eat it!"

They were so delighted to get away from Jacobsdal, which, it must be confessed, is about as miserable a hole as can well be imagined, that they cheerfully paid the landlord's outrageous demand of twelve shillings a head for the supper they had scarcely touched, and the beds they had been only too glad to vacate. The coach rolled on drearily over monotonous sandy wastes, but they reached the junction of the Riet and Modder rivers at last, and made the best of what Heath declared was the nearest imitation of a square meal they had enjoyed since leaving the colonial border.

They were all fast asleep when the coach reached Dutoitspan about six o'clock, just as a tremendous thunderstorm, that would have awakened them but for the rattle of the coach, which more or less drowned the peals of thunder, began to break. As they pulled up in front of a dissipated-looking iron shanty, nearly facing the Dutoitspan Club, from the stoep of which some twenty or thirty men were idly watching to see whether any of their acquaintance happened to be among the passengers, the air for a moment seemed to be converted into fire, the whole street was one huge blaze of brilliant white flame, and right on top of it there came a crash which fairly took them off their seats.

"Well, that begins to feel like being at home, anyhow," said Heath, as soon as it was possible to speak; "sounds almost as good as the real old-fashioned Arizona ear-splitters that used to make me wish I was hard of hearing, the first summer I was around there."

The lightning was incessant, and the flashes seemed to be dodging in and out among the vehicles and pedestrians in the street, and between the houses, in a manner which would have frightened the boldest Cockney in existence; and Solomon, being naturally rather nervous than otherwise, both felt and looked terribly frightened. He was glad to get into the bar of the little public-house where the coach had pulled up, and pick out the darkest corner, in which he took a seat with his back to the window, so as to see as little of the blinding lightning as possible. Solomon had never seen anything like such a storm before, and he felt quite angry with Bunton and Heath, who stood outside under the verandah, apparently enjoying the exhibition of atmospheric fireworks, and laughing every now and then as an unfortunate pedestrian, with a portable deluge running off his hat-brim, scuttled past them, or sought shelter under the same roof.

Presently the rain gave place to hail, which came down as if fired out of a battery of gatlings, and made such a horrible din on the iron roofs as completely put the thunder out of the running. The lightning cut its zigzag, hissing path through the continuous volley of hail-stones; but though it appeared to be striking within a few yards of where they stood, Bunton and Heath

could not catch so much as a whisper of the tremendous explosions which must have accompanied it. The doctor admired the display, but thought it a shocking waste of energy, and wondered when Bell, Eddison, or some other of the modern giants of science would invent a machine to put a stop to such elemental extravagance, and enable man to draw his supply of electricity direct from the clouds.

The roadway in front of the stoep on which they were standing assumed the appearance of a river, which rapidly developed into an angry, eddying torrent, cutting great gaps in the side walks, carrying away wooden foot-bridges like so many matches, and bearing on its muddy surface a heterogeneous collection of old paraffin and meat-cans, and rubbish of all descriptions, picked up in its passage through the untidy back yards and Kafir compounds of the camp. The hail-stones increased in size until the place was being bombarded with great jagged lumps of ice, which dented the corrugated iron roofs and verandahs, and now and then tore their way completely through these flimsy structures. Traffic of all kinds was suspended; the only living things in the streets being the unfortunate poultry and a stray dog or two, which had been caught by the flood, and were powerless against the force of water that was sweeping them away.

The coach was standing in front of the hotel where it had pulled up—without the team, which had been taken into a stable to protect them from the hail—up to the axles in water, and with a white mass of hail on the roof which made it look like the indigestible

wedding-cake ornaments exhibited in London confectioners' windows.

Presently an iron mining truck, weighing hundreds of pounds, came tumbling end-over-end down the torrent. Two or three niggers rushed out from beneath verandahs and made insane grabs at it, but were carried off their feet, and had all they could do to make dry land again. Next a Scotch cart, with the shafts broken short off and one wheel missing, came gambolling along like a porpoise on a pleasure excursion. This was followed by a huge iron tank that bobbed about like a gigantic cork, and jumped clean out of the water every time it struck bottom. Then the whole side of a raw brick building, the proprietor of which was in the grocery and Kafir-truck business, fell bodily into the street; and blankets, boxes, bag-stuff, and groceries, to the value of some hundreds of pounds, went sailing along to destruction. The coach was afloat every now and then, but the driver had taken the precaution to make it fast to the verandah posts by means of strong *reims*, so that as long as the latter held on it was safe enough. Gradually the lightning became less vivid and frequent, the hail moderated, changed into rain, which finally ceased altogether, and in a quarter of an hour the evening sun shone out brilliantly, while the spent clouds gathered themselves together in a black, sullen mass, and set sail for the south, as if savage at not being able to do more damage. The storm had barely lasted an hour, but Dutoitspan lies in a hollow, and acts as a dam for the rainfall for some distance round, and the streets are so badly laid out that it takes very little rain to flood the place.

Solomon came out of his retreat in the dark corner of the bar, and was unmercifully chaffed by Heath for showing the white feather. The doctor took his *protégé's* part, and explained to Heath that the mere fact of a person's exhibiting nervous symptoms during a thunder-storm could not always be interpreted as infallibly arguing cowardice on his part. Solomon was not in a frame of mind to be able to undertake his own defence, and felt very grateful to Bunton for speaking up for him, though he owed to him later on that he had never been in such a ghastly state of terror in his life.

The horses were inspanned as soon as the streets were navigable, and shortly before ten o'clock our friends found themselves comfortably housed beneath the hospitable roof-tree of Mrs. Jardine, of the 'Queen's Hotel,' Kimberley, a lady whose name has been a household word among all generations of Diamond Fieldites from the commencement of diamond digging on the Vaal River in 1870.

And as they could not possibly be in better hands or more comfortable quarters, with the reader's permission we will leave them there for the present.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER ARRIVAL

WE have been paying so much attention to the fortunes of our two ocean travellers that we have lost sight of Captain Cormack and his young friends altogether, for the last three chapters. This in the eyes of critics will, I suppose, constitute a heinous offence against the mysterious canons of fiction writing. I can't help that. I am writing in a temperature of somewhere about 110° in the shade—such as it is—and the technicalities of scientific story-telling are altogether out of the running in such a vapour bath as I am suffering in.

Cormack waited till the dreaded examination was over, and Hayes and Caldecott duly ploughed—very much to their satisfaction—and then proceeded to Henley to arrange matters in connection with the projected trip abroad. He met both General Hayes and Mr. Monkton, and found them prepared to treat him on a scale of liberality which completely eclipsed his most extravagant expectations.

It was arranged that they should make Cherbourg their first point, and take their own time over the journey to Paris. By managing matters in this way,

Hayes considered they would be fairly entitled, on their return, to claim the *kudos* of having performed a walking tour. However, the plan was not carried into execution, because, by the time they had done the country between Cherbourg and Carentan, all three declared they had had more than enough of the beauties of Norman scenery. Arrived in Paris, they took up their quarters at Meurice's, and set to work to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

It is no part of my plan to attempt to describe the proceedings of the trio for the next three months. People who know the ways of young Englishmen let loose in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna for a holiday will agree with me that to go into details regarding the visit of Cormack and his two charges to these three cities would be more than risky. They enjoyed themselves to the top of their bent, and the two younger men suffered more or less severely, both in health and pocket, for their indiscretions. A case-hardened old stager like Cormack, who, thanks to an abnormally vigorous constitution, had come through the mill of dissipation seemingly hardier than he entered it, was not very likely to feel any serious apprehension as to the probable results of the rackets life his two charges were leading.

They had been in Vienna about a fortnight, when Hayes said to Cormack, one morning at breakfast, at which meal Caldecott had of late frequently failed to put in an appearance, "Do you know, Captain, I fancy there's something wrong with Waggles. He seems to be getting so listless and lazy. Why it's a week at least since he turned up to breakfast."

"Knocked himself up with late hours, bad wine, and worse company, probably," replied Cormack. "But you have no reason to suppose that it is anything more serious than that, have you?"

"Well, yes. You know we occupy the same bed-room when at home here. Well, lately I have noticed that Wag has a bad cough, which often keeps him, and myself too, awake till long past daylight. And he is quite snappish when I ask him about it. I have heard that his father died of consumption; and so, you see, I feel a little anxious about Waggles, and thought I would ask you to speak to him and urge him to obtain advice."

"By Jove, that I certainly shall, without a moment's delay," said Cormack, jumping up and ringing the bell. "I had no idea you suspected that there was anything serious the matter. I shall send for a doctor at once, and insist on Caldecott's seeing him before he leaves his room. I wish you had spoken sooner; I noticed nothing wrong with the boy myself."

"Oh, of course it may turn out to be only fancy on my part," said Hayes, "but I am glad I have told you, all the same."

In the course of the next half-hour the doctor, an English physician settled in Vienna, made his appearance. Cormack had some little difficulty in persuading Caldecott to see him; but on his threatening to telegraph to Mr. Monkton if he refused to do so, he gave in, and submitted to be questioned and examined by the doctor. It was some time before the latter returned to the sitting-room, where the Captain and Hayes had

retired while the doctor was with his patient. And when he did return, his expression was a very serious one indeed. Beckoning Cormack into the corner, he spoke for some minutes in a low voice; the Captain occasionally interrupting with ejaculations such as, "By Jove!" "good God, you don't say so!" "The deuce!" and so on. The physician left, after writing a couple of prescriptions, giving some directions to the Captain, and pocketing a very handsome fee, promising to see his patient again the next morning.

"Well, this is a nice state of affairs, truly," remarked Cormack, as the door closed on the doctor. "Here am I, appointed by his guardian specially to look after that young scapegrace's morals, and this morning the doctor tells me that he has been dissipating himself into a consumption under my very nose. What on earth I shall find to say to Mr. and Mrs. Monkton, hang me if I know. Waiter, bring me a brandy-and-soda," as that functionary appeared, in answer to a violent peal of the bell.

"Oh, Captain, surely it is not so bad as that?" asked Hayes with glistening eyes.

"Well, no, perhaps not quite so bad yet," replied the Captain; "but what a blind old bat I must have been to notice nothing! However, the doctor says rest, country air, and dairy diet will soon pull him together again if the mischief has not gone too far; but the lad will always be delicate and need take great care of himself. I am sick of this tawdry asylum for fraudulent insolvents, broken-down gamblers, and diplomatic prostitutes, and the sooner we are out of it the better for all of us. I

think, as the three months are nearly up, the best thing we can do will be to move home by easy stages. The doctor says the journey through would probably be too much for young Caldecott."

So in a few days, the doctor reporting his patient able to undertake a portion of the journey, they left Vienna, and moved forward by short stages until they found themselves again in Paris. Caldecott had stood the journey fairly well ; but since the doctor had stated the nature of the malady which threatened him, he had abandoned his pretence of good health, and his appearance plainly indicated that the mischief was unchecked.

Cormack had written to Mr. Monkton from Vienna, stating that his ward was suffering from a cold, which had induced a slight attack of inflammation of the lungs, but that he hoped to have him all right again in a day or two. By the time they reached Paris, Caldecott was looking so haggard and fallen-in about the face, that the Captain decided not to remain in the capital, but to take up their quarters at the village of Passy, and endeavour to patch up the patient with milk, eggs, and cream preparatory to crossing the Channel.

After ten days of this treatment, combined with plenty of open air and carriage exercise, Caldecott looked so much more like himself that Cormack determined to take him home without further delay. The journey was effected without difficulty, though the weather was damp and cold ; and Mr. Monkton and General Hayes met the party at Henley with the phaeton and a dog-cart, which provided ample accommodation for all. The two old gentlemen were very much surprised and shocked at

Caldecott's altered appearance, and the ladies of Mr. Monkton's family, especially his younger daughter, could hardly conceal their distress.

After dinner, the invalid having been coaxed to bed immediately after tea by Mrs. Monkton, Cormack told the two seniors what it suited him to let them know concerning young Caldecott's illness. It was, he said, the result of a severe cold caught during a boating excursion; and though it had pulled him down very much, he was on the mend now, and would soon, the doctor at Vienna had assured him, be about and in his usual good health again. Young Hayes had, without much thought, promised to tell the same story, and was indeed retailing it to the ladies in the drawing-room, while the Captain was telling it in the dining-room. Mr. Monkton thanked Cormack for his kindness in nursing his ward so assiduously, but expressed his intention of telegraphing to town for an eminent physician the next morning.

The great man came down in response to the ex-banker's message, spent about five minutes with his patient, during which he took snuff a great many times and asked some apparently objectless questions, and, condescended to remain to lunch, during which repast he vouchsafed the opinion that Caldecott was constitutionally delicate, and would require to be very careful of himself for the next three or four years to come. It would not be wise for him to pass the coming winter in England. He did not say that organic disease was actually developed, but there was every sign of a strong tendency that way, and prevention being proverbially better than

cure, he thought the wisest plan would be to send the patient for a time to a more genial climate, which would give his constitution a chance to become strong enough to resist the insidious approaches of tubercular disease.

This conversation took place in the presence of General Hayes, Mr. Monkton, and the Captain only, the remainder of the family being excluded from the luncheon table in order to give the doctor an opportunity of speaking freely.

Various places celebrated as health resorts were then discussed, the physician maintaining that Madeira was superior to all foreign places in this respect. To this Cormack, who had been in the island more than once, strongly demurred. The place was little better than a pig-stye, he considered. It certainly was unpleasantly hot and muggy there all the year round, and this, he supposed, was what people called its genial climate; but if the warmth were good for consumption, the want of drainage and dirty habits of the Portuguese inhabitants were sure to breed typhoid fever in people accustomed to pure air and the due observance of the decencies of life.

"Well, sir," said the doctor, who appeared somewhat astonished at the Captain's vehement disparagement of his pet sanitarium, "since you have so many objections to Madeira, which has always been well thought of by the profession as a resort for persons with chest symptoms, perhaps you may be able to suggest an improvement upon it?"

"Certainly I can," answered Cormack, readily. "The

principal *desiderata* for consumptives are a moderately warm climate and extreme dryness, are they not?"

"Granted," said the doctor.

"Well then, I know a place between four and five thousand feet above sea-level, where the rainfall only averages about eight inches in the twelve months; and if that isn't dry enough for you, well, I don't know. And there are more days of bright sunshine there in a year than we have hours in many parts of England. The only objection is that the journey is a long one; but it is a very pleasant trip indeed. I mean starting on it myself in a day or two."

"What part of the world are you speaking of, sir?" asked the doctor.

"Of Griqualand West, in South Africa—of the Diamond Fields," replied Cormack.

"Ah, yes, that is on the borders of the Free State, about which, as a health resort, I was reading a pamphlet the other day," returned the doctor. "I have no doubt Griqualand West is well adapted for persons predisposed to chest complaints; but, as you say, the length of the journey would be a fatal objection in most cases."

"Do you think, doctor, that it would be advisable to try Griqualand West for my ward," asked Mr. Monkton, "or would the journey be too much for him?"

"The sea voyage is just what he wants, provided the weather be favourable; and the change of scene and dry climate of South Africa would, no doubt, work wonders for him," answered the doctor.

"If he goes, I go too," said Frank Hayes, who had come into the room a few minutes before.

"Of course, my boy, that is understood," said his father approvingly.

"Well, Captain, what say you ; will you add to the great kindness you have already done us by taking charge of the two boys for a while in South Africa ?" asked Mr. Monkton.

"That I will, with all the pleasure in life ; and bring them back safe and sound, please Providence," replied Cormack ; "I am expecting to find letters at my rooms from some old friends who have recently settled on the Fields ; and unless there be anything in them against it, I mean to start as soon as possible."

The Captain, on returning to his lodgings, found several letters from Bunton and Solomon Davis, in which full particulars of the journey by sea and land were given by both, together with much information about the Fields, and a very strong recommendation to lose no time in following them. Bunton's last letter enclosed introductions to Mr. Blowser and others of his Capetown and Port Elizabeth acquaintances, and a draft for two hundred pounds, in return for that which he had received from his friend and partner. This letter had arrived three weeks before Cormack got it, from which it was evident that Bunton concluded that he had already started on his way out. He therefore decided to lose no more time than he could help in commencing his journey ; and, a week after their return from France, our three friends were starting from Southampton, on board the Union Company's steamer *Trojan*, on their way to Port Elizabeth.

The voyage was smooth and uneventful, and the

passengers were such a pleasant lot of people, the ship so comfortable, and the attendance and table so excellent, that the Captain and his two charges felt quite sorry as they said good-bye to Captain Larmer, and shook hands for the last time with him and his officers in Algoa Bay.

The Captain telegraphed to Bunton at Kimberley, announcing their safe arrival, and received a reply, urging him to leave by the next coach. Caldecott had improved so much in health during the voyage, that he declared himself fit for any amount of travelling. And there being no other reason for delay, the party started, travelling the same route as that over which Bunton and Davis had passed previously, and arrived in Kimberley on the sixth evening out, somewhat stiff and fatigued, but otherwise none the worse for their journey.

At Alexandersfontein, seven miles out of camp, they were met by Bunton and Solomon Davis, in a showy Cape cart drawn by two magnificent bay stallions; and after a very cordial greeting on both sides, all five managed to stow themselves away in the cart, and drove up in style to the residence now occupied by Bunton and Davis in Currey Street.

Cormack briefly explained to his partner how he had come to be accompanied by Hayes and Caldecott; adding that the General and Mr. Monkton had procured him introductions which would be invaluable to them in business. The doctor, in return, went into details of some of his more recent transactions, and said that from being his right hand, Solomon had gradually become really his superior in finesse and fertility of

resource ; and that it would be impossible now to get on without his unlimited coolness and active brain to depend upon when in a dilemma. I should add that Cormack, Hayes, and Caldecott had called upon the Blowers in Port Elizabeth, bearing Bunton's introduction, and that the hospitable merchant and his wife and daughter had received them with the utmost kindness.

Now that the Diamond Fields have become the scene of action, so far as most of our characters are concerned, it may be well to say a few words by way of description of that curious corner of creation.

CHAPTER XII.

I. D. B. EXPOUNDED

GRIQUALAND WEST has absolutely nothing but its mineral wealth and healthy climate to recommend it. And quite enough too, to satisfy ordinary mortals, you will say. But it must be remembered that the mining-camps or townships were formerly as unhealthy as the open country is salubrious, and that residence in the former is made miserable by dust storms, bad servants, tinned vegetables, tin houses, and extreme heat.

There are four mines in the Kimberley group ; namely, Kimberley—formerly Colesberg Kopje, or New Rush, which latter appellation is still often used by old diggers—Old de Beer's, about a mile from Kimberley, and Dutoitspan and Buetsfontein, two large mines lying close together, about two and a half miles from Kimberley. Each mine has its own township or camp ; Kimberley being divided into Kimberley, West End, and Newton. A new township between Old de Beer's and Dutoitspan has sprung up during the past few years, under the name of Beaconsfield ; and portions of Dutoitspan and Buetsfontein camps now go by the name of the great statesman whose memory is so dear to all South African colonists. Some enterprising idiot endeavoured, a short

time ago, to give the Grand Old Man a habitation and a name on the Fields, by cutting up some ground opposite Beaconsfield, and selling it in building lots under the name of Gladstone. But the Fieldites would have no such desecration of their favourite British statesman. Gladstone was sold and built upon, but its inhabitants persistently ignored the name on their title-deeds ; and now Gladstone has become merged in Beaconsfield, which is rapidly growing into a large and flourishing township.

Ten years ago burnt bricks and mortar were unknown on the Fields. The majority of the houses were corrugated iron shells, lined with match-board, calico, canvas, or unburnt mud bricks. During the past five or six years many handsome brick and stone buildings have been erected for the banks, public companies, and Government offices, but most of the private houses and hotels are of iron, and many of them are exceedingly tasteful and comfortable buildings. There is now an abundant supply of excellent water, brought in pipes from Riverton on the Vaal River, some eighteen miles from Kimberley. But four years ago the inhabitants of the four camps were entirely dependent upon surface wells for their water, the quality of which was often not far short of absolutely poisonous. This fact furnished a convenient pretext for the enormous consumption of fermented and distilled liquors for which the Diamond Fields have always been remarkable. Unlike most South African towns, especially those of Dutch origin, the mining townships of the Diamond Fields are laid out without the slightest regard to symmetry. The streets

twist and turn about in all sorts of unexpected directions, and most of the houses look as if they had been shaken out of a huge pepper-box, and allowed to remain where they fell. Each man built, till within quite recent times, just as it suited him; no two houses in any street were alike, and nobody ever troubled about keeping to the line of street. Some people put up respectable fences; others were satisfied with split-up packing cases; others did not consider it necessary to divide their compounds from those of their neighbours at all. A broad belt of refuse of all kinds extended pretty well round the camps; amidst which droves of hideous, mangy, gaunt pigs revelled and increased in length of leg and jaw till they resembled the wolf more than their proper species. The sanitary arrangements, now so nearly perfect, in the early days were totally disregarded, and stores and houses were built upon carelessly closed cesspools and fever-beds of all descriptions. No wonder diphtheria decimated the children born in camp, and camp-fever killed adults by the score in the summer months.

The coloured population, Malays, Indians, Chinese, and natives of every tribe and shade of colour, lived like pigs in styes but a short distance from the European quarters; in fact, in some parts, Whites and coloured people were mixed up indiscriminately. Drinking-dens innumerable, many of which were also gambling-hells, were scattered about the camps, where the natives were maddened and often poisoned by the horrible doctored Cape brandy and Natal rum dispensed by the ruffians who kept them. Men were drugged, robbed, and put

out of the way in these nests of crime, and their bodies were picked up in the veldt, or dragged out of wells, the water from which becoming more villainous in flavour than usual gave notice of the unceremonious funeral of the victim.

But not once in a hundred cases were the criminals traced. Indeed the authorities became so used to this sort of thing that little or no trouble was ever taken to discover the perpetrators of these outrages. During 1880, murders took place on three successive Saturday nights on one of the Kimberley mining companies' depositing floors, not one of which was ever traced. The daily papers used to amuse their readers by keeping a head-line in type—"Another brutal murder on the — Company's floors;" and when no murder took place, promising particulars in the next issue.

Fires were so common at one time, and occurred under such suspicious circumstances, that the Colonial insurance companies and agencies kept on raising their rates till they were almost prohibitive; and, finally, refused all but very first-class risks. But arson and murder, theft and embezzlement, were hardly looked upon in the light of first-class crimes on the Fields in those days.

There was only one unpardonable sin in the estimation of the honest portion of that curiously constituted population. And that sin was, and still is, *I. D. B.*

I dare say many of my readers have been puzzled by the three mysterious letters which form the title of this volume. Their signification is simple enough; being neither more nor less than *Illicit Diamond Buying*. And

when one considers that the value of diamonds stolen, and bought by the I. D. B.'s, is estimated to reach from a million to a million and a half sterling *per annum*; that fifty *per cent.*—some say seventy-five *per cent.*—of the population of the Diamond Fields are either I. D. B.'s, or indirectly interested in the illicit traffic, it will be readily admitted that the influence exerted by the I. D. B.'s on the general trade of the Diamond Fields can hardly be exaggerated.

Many of the large fortunes made on the Fields certainly owe their foundation, if not their entire existence, to I. D. B. In fact it may be said that very many of the lucky ones had to thank illicit diamond buying for the nucleus of their prosperity.

In the early days, illicit diamond buying, though always looked upon by the honest minority as an offence of which none but a blackleg or thief would be guilty, was not so severely dealt with by the law as it is at present. And it was not an uncommon thing then for the diggers, when driven to desperation, to administer a little lynch law to the scoundrels who encouraged their boys to steal diamonds. For instance, when it became known that a canteen-keeper was buying stolen diamonds from niggers, the diggers would form a posse, surround the canvas, wooden, or iron building in which the rascally grog-seller carried on his nefarious traffic, order, or haul him out, and burn his shanty, with the whole of his stock, to the ground. But the big men who were at the bottom of I. D. B. were seldom or never caught. Now and then one of these kings of iniquity would be arrested. But in most cases the

evidence was defective; the important witness was spirited away; or the prisoner escaped.

Later on, when more stringent legislative action was adopted to crush the illicit traffic, regular I. D. B. rings were formed, the heads of which were frequently men of capital and position, who found the money for the purchase of the stolen gems, but were careful to take so little risk that it was next to impossible to trap them. Now and then the agents or runners of these rings were trapped and convicted. And it is worthy of notice that although these men were perfectly well aware that, by turning Queen's evidence and betraying their principals, they could be certain of obtaining, if not a full pardon, at least a substantial mitigation of their sentence, not one of them (so far as I am informed) has ever "gone back" on his employers. There are hundreds of men holding good social positions, and carrying their heads with the front rank on the Fields to-day, who would be convicts labouring on the Capetown breakwater, if some of their employés, who are now working out their sentences on that wonderful specimen of marine engineering, had chosen to let the cat out of the bag.

The amount of crime on the Fields has always been out of all proportion to the population. A statement published by Government, shows that in 1885, six and a half *per cent.* of the entire population of forty thousand odd were convicted of misdemeanours of greater or less magnitude. And it is safe to say that for one criminal brought to justice on the Fields, at least half-a-dozen escape the clutches of the law.

The house in Currey Street, occupied by Dr. Bunton and Mr. Solomon Davis, was not by any means of palatial proportions; and it was only by means of very tight squeezing that accommodation was provided for the three new-comers. The morning following their arrival was spent in inspecting the mine and township of Kimberley, under the guidance of the doctor; Solomon having business of importance to attend to at the office.

Hayes and Caldecott were so much interested in watching the blue ground being hauled to the surface in the tubs running on aerial tramways, that Bunton and Cormack left them to gaze their fill from the margin of the mine, while they strolled over to the office in which the doctor and his *protégé* transacted their business. It was by no means a pretentious building, being exactly like a large—yet not very large—dog-kennel, with a wooden partition in the centre, which divided the private from the public office. In the front office, behind a counter, part of which was carried up to within four feet of the ceiling as a glazed screen, sat Solomon Davis. Facing him, in a glass case with a slide up, stood a handsome pair of diamond scales, the agate bearings and expensive ivory mountings of which seemed to indicate that their owners must be doing a very prosperous business; as indeed was the case. On a board outside the office-door appeared the legend—"R. Bunton, Solomon Davis, Licensed Diamond Buyers." And just inside the door were pasted up the said licenses, duly stamped and signed.

When the doctor and Cormack entered, Solomon was

very busy weighing off and sorting up several diggers' parcels; and he was so intent upon his work that he merely said, "Morning; take a seat," and went on with it without even glancing at his visitors. They seated themselves in silence on the only two apologies for chairs which the office afforded, Bunton winking at Cormack to keep quiet, and the Captain highly amused at the business-like air affected by Solomon.

"Doctor, just come and cast your eye over this lot," presently said Solomon, without looking up; "they want us to spring half-a-crown on yesterday's offer, and I can't see it."

"How did you know I was here?" asked Bunton, rising. "You never looked at us when we came in."

"Yes, I did. That's the Captain sitting alongside, isn't it? Well, I only had to look at your boots to recognize you both at once. I can identify pretty well every man that comes into this office by his boots, without looking further. And what is more, I can often tell what a man is thinking about by the way he moves and places his feet."

"Clever lad," said the Captain, approvingly, as he and Bunton went round behind the counter and began to examine the diamonds. The inspection over, the three left the office, Solomon locking the door and putting the key in his pocket, and had a turn round the diamond market, which consisted of numerous buildings of the same order of architecture as that they had just quitted. Diamond brokers in white suits, or in their shirt sleeves, wearing white helmets, or carrying white umbrellas, were rushing along the side-walks, or

diving into and taking headers out of the little bathing-machines of offices, as if too intent upon business to look which way they were going. The dry, hot air was alive with a busy hum of conversation and hurrying feet. At the corner of Natal Street, overlooking the vast abyss of the mine, the 'Mining Board Bar' was evidently doing a tremendous business. Men came tumbling out of its swing-doors in twos and threes, wiping their lips, and then separating with a, "So long, old man; see you at tiffin."—"Try and put that through for us," or something of the kind.

Most of those they passed nodded to Cormack's two companions with a "Morning, doctor"—"How do, Davis"—in a free-and-easy way which the two gentlemen addressed reciprocated in replying to these salutations.

Cormack noticed that fully two-thirds of the men they met on the diamond market were Jews; and turning to Solomon, said, "Well, you ought to be at home here, at any rate. I'm hanged if it ain't a regular New Jerusalem."

"Yes, *The People* do muster pretty strong; and there are some rum customers amongst them, I can tell you."

"I should think so, to judge from their physiognomies; but I fancy you are a tolerably fair match for the smartest of them, eh?"

Solomon laughed, but said nothing in reply to the compliment.

In the afternoon, as soon as it was bearable out of doors, the doctor took Cormack and the two youngsters down to Dutoitspan in a cab, and showed them round

that and Buetsfontein mine, returning to Kimberley just in time for dinner. Heath came in for dinner, having been invited by Bunton to meet his friends, and amused Hayes and Caldecott immensely with his extraordinary tales of his adventures in the far West ; which by this time had come to be voted a bore by both Bunton and Solomon. The other three were engaged in serious, half-whispered conversation for the greater part of the evening ; and the clock on the dining-room side-board struck ten and eleven, before the cloth was removed from the table by the rather overdressed female of uncertain age and evident Jewish race, who officiated as housekeeper of the joint establishment. Soda and etceteras were placed on the mahogany by this lady, who then retired with a scarcely respectful "Good-night," and the conversation between the two trios commenced afresh.

A few minutes before twelve, a gentle tap was heard at the window, and Solomon left the room. A quarter of an hour afterwards he returned, and made a sign to Bunton, who had been fidgeting strangely during his absence. Bunton went out, Solomon taking his place beside Cormack.

"What is up?" asked the latter.

"Nothing. It's all right," answered Solomon, in a whisper. "Wait till Bunton comes back, and you'll see."

The doctor returned shortly afterwards, relit his cigar, winked pleasantly to Solomon, and said, "Sol, one of us must go down to the claims first thing to-morrow. That wretched old whim has broken down again, and

Joe says anything like permanent repairs are altogether beyond his engineering capabilities. The old thing has cost more money than it's worth already for tinkering. I really think we must go in for steam."

"Oh, I dare say we can get it patched up for awhile longer. We must wait till diamonds spring a bit before we can afford to invest three or four hundred in an engine. Forage is far cheaper than coal when one is working on so small a scale as we are." And he laughed slyly.

"I didn't know that you were engaged in mining operations as well as the diamond business," said Cormack.

"Only in a very small way," replied the doctor. "We bought a small block of ground in de Beer's for a mere song the other day, and so long as it pays expenses we go on working it in the hope of better results. We have a man to attend to the working, and only go down, as a rule, to the wash-up, ourselves." And again he laughed in a peculiar and mysterious manner.

Presently Heath, who had not abandoned his bibulous habits, and had that evening absorbed far more whiskey than was good for his equilibrium, arose and took his leave, an operation that involved shaking hands with all the party three times over, and wishing each of them good-bye as solemnly as if he thought it extremely problematical whether they would ever see each other again. Hayes and Caldecott took themselves off to bed soon after Heath's departure, and the other three had the room to themselves.

"You can bring them in now, Solomon," said Bunton.

Solomon went out of the room and presently returned with a small white paper parcel. Before opening it he went round and thoroughly examined the Venetian blinds, to see that there were no chinks through which any one outside might be able to watch them. When he had fully satisfied himself that it was impossible for any uninvited pair of eyes to assist in examining the contents of his parcel, he laid it on the table, and proceeded carefully to remove the paper coverings. At length he came to an ordinary wooden match-box, which he opened and emptied on the table. Some thirty magnificent gems, weighing from one carat up to seven or eight-and-twenty, rolled out on the polished surface of the mahogany. Cormack took them up one by one, remarking what a singularly perfect lot they were. At this Bunton laughed quietly; while Solomon's amusement evinced itself in a more demonstrative form, and very nearly choked him.

"Do you find many stones as fine in colour and perfect in shape in the claims at de Beer's?" presently asked Cormack, who was greatly mystified as to the cause of his companions' levity.

"Well, yes; we can't complain lately. In fact, I'm half afraid we've been finding too much fine stuff. However, we must make hay while the sun shines; our ground will be growing valuable presently. In fact, I had a sort of bite at it the other day from Gouiva-vitch; but we must not sell till we can get our full price for it."

"And how much may that be, Bunton?" asked Cormack.

"Five thousand a claim, my boy. That's how much."

"Five thousand devils!" ejaculated Cormack. "You must be raving, man."

"Not the least in the world, I assure you," said Bunton, quietly. "My price—or rather, our price—for those claims, is five thousand per claim, and we shall wait till we get it."

"I expect you will," laughed Cormack.

"And we shall not have to wait long either," continued Bunton, with just a suspicion of a sneer in his voice.

"Eight claims at five thousand a claim would be forty thousand pounds," said Cormack slowly, with the swell pedal on.

"Yes, I believe there's no doubt about that," assented Bunton.

"But how in the name of all that is wonderful have you two, who came out here a few months ago with considerably less than a thousand, managed to become possessed of property worth anything approaching the sum you have just named? Dick, you're not poking fun at me, surely, are you?"

"I'm perfectly serious, my friend. And as you doubt, or appear to doubt it, I'll take you down to de Beer's to-morrow morning and trot you over our ground, so as to give you some idea of our system of diamond mining. And now I suggest that we indulge in a night-cap, and then be off to our temporarily virtuous couches. But before saying good night, old fellow, let me warn you never to be surprised at the quantity or quality of diamonds that we may—ahem—find at Old

de Beer's ; to remember that you are my partner ; that silence is golden ; and that every brick and every sheet of iron in Kimberley walls have ears. You've heard of I. D. B.? Well, there are two ways of working it ; the safe, respectable way, and the blackguard, foolish, dangerous way. I am not exactly a fool. Do you understand now ?"

"The devil!" ejaculated Cormack ; "give me a soda-and-brandy, or I shall dream of handcuffs and leg-irons."

"If we never do worse than dream of them, I shall be quite contented," laughed the doctor. "Well, here's *chin chin*, and pleasant dreams!"

CHAPTER XIII.

JOE

OLD SOL is a remarkably sudden riser during the summer months in Griqualand West, and takes very little time over his toilet. One look at his red visage sets one's eyes watering, and makes one feel unpleasantly hot for the rest of the day. The glittering iron roofs reflect his pitiless, scorching rays back towards the cloudless sky in long quivering flames of mirage, the continual flicker of which distorts all objects at any distance into the most fantastic and unreasonable proportions. Buildings turn themselves upside-down ; horses appear to be travelling with their heels in the air ; men are seen walking on their heads ; and patches of white sand are converted into lakes of rippling white water under the influence of this curious practical joke of Dame Nature. A thin cloud of impalpable white dust rises as soon as the traffic begins in the camps, and hangs over them till long after nightfall, when it gradually subsides, to rise again next morning. Dust-spouts many hundreds of feet high, caused by liliputian local whirlwinds, float about, like so many huge aërial corkscrews, in all directions. Sometimes a dozen or more of these dust-pipes may be seen twisting and

gyrating around each other within quite a small area, reminding one of a lot of preposterously tall circus clowns performing a burlesque waltz. Towards the afternoon of these very hot days, thunderstorms generally form among the hills round the camps; and, when they break, as is usually the case, either directly overhead, or in the immediate neighbourhood, they soon reduce the temperature to a comparatively tolerable level. Thunderstorms unaccompanied by rain or hail—dry storms, in Diamond Fields phraseology—are frequent in the hot season. The absence of rain or hail as a medium to assist in restoring the electrical equilibrium between earth and sky makes these dry storms very dangerous, especially to buildings and persons in isolated positions in the open veldt; and many fatal accidents occur every summer. No doubt the enormous amount of iron in machinery, houses, railways, and wire-tramways at the Fields carries off harmlessly a great deal of lightning, which, if such conductors were not available, would increase the death-rate from lightning accidents to an enormous extent. But it is quite appalling enough as it is; and it is no wonder that the niggers are so frightened of lightning that it is almost impossible to prevent them leaving their work as soon as a heavy storm gets under way within striking distance of their employment.

The morning following the events recorded in the last chapter broke bright and cloudless, and by the time the doctor and Cormack had finished an early breakfast, and the cart was at the door, inspanned ready to start, the heat was so oppressive that Cormack was glad to

abandon his tweed tourist suit for a white jacket and continuations in imitation of his friend's costume. A white helmet with a red silk pugaree was substituted for his soft felt smasher ; and the Captain, being a tall, broad-shouldered, handsome fellow, could not help congratulating himself on the extremely picturesque effect of his new outfit.

The drive out to de Beer's, through Kimberley market square, where hundreds of eager buyers were competing for the loads of forage, firewood, and garden stuff, brought in by scores of ox-wagons, which made driving a pair of high-spirited horses through them a matter of some difficulty ; along past the cricket-ground, where cocoa-nut matting does duty for the turf which refuses to grow ; on to the depositing floors outside the mine, did not occupy many minutes.

Although it was but little after six o'clock, the streets and side-walks were alive with traffic ; most of the stores and shops and all the bars were open, the latter thronged with customers absorbing their morning pegs. The hum of the tubs along the wires, the blast of the hauling engines, and the thousand and one indefinable sounds that are inseparable from the working of the mines testified to the fact that the vast inverted beehive of Kimberley mine was in full swing ; and that, although the inhabitants of the Fields were noted for late hours, abnormal consumption of alcoholic liquors, a predilection for games of chance, and generally none too strait-laced morality, there were but few drones amongst them ; or if that were not the case, that the said drones knew better than to exhibit themselves under the early

morning sun, beside their more industrious and reputable fellow-townsmen.

Bunton and Cormack left their cart in charge of the Hottentot groom, and took a stroll round the margin of de Beer's mine, which, in those days was of comparatively unimposing depth, and appeared very insignificant in Cormack's eyes after the big hole at Kimberley. Still there were a good many engines puffing merrily away as they hauled the laden tubs up the steep yielding wires; and the number of Scotch carts and tram-trucks employed in removing the diamondiferous soil from the delivery-boxes to the depositing floors and washing machines, indicated that a vast deal of work was being got through by the gangs of niggers working with pick and shovel down below.

Looking down over the edge of the reef into the claims, Cormack said, "And so that's diamond-mining is it? Well, if you hadn't told me that ugly hole was a diamond mine, I should have put it down as a gravel-pit. But what on earth are those round white things, for all the world like gigantic mushrooms, stuck about all over the sides and bottom?"

"Those?" asked Bunton, pointing down with his cart-whip, which he retained, Colonial fashion, in order to prevent the groom playing tricks with the horses in his absence; "those are white cotton umbrellas; and there's an overseer under each of them. And I wouldn't mind venturing a small bet that a considerable majority of those supposed-to-be wide-awake gentlemen are asleep at this present moment, early as it is. Come, we'll try!"

So saying, Bunton led the way a little further along the reef, stopping opposite a two-horse whim, at which two very somnolent candidates for the knacker's yard were lazily engaged in alternately raising and lowering a couple of small iron buckets from some claims about a hundred and fifty feet below where they stood. Two of the mushroom tops were visible amongst a crowd of some twenty blackskins; and Bunton, leaning over the edge, and supporting himself by one of the guys of the depositing-box, dropped a fair-sized pebble plumb on the top of the umbrella immediately below him.

The umbrella bobbed, responsive to the weight of the stone, but its proprietor slept on unconscious of the disturbance in the balance of his sun-shade.

"Try another," suggested Cormack, laughing.

"No, wait till I call Joe; and we'll give the sleepy gentleman down yonder a good fright."

Joe, in obedience to the doctor, brought a dynamite cap, or detonator, and a few inches of fuze. The fuze was carefully inserted into the copper tube of the cap, ignited from Bunton's cigar, and dropped within a few feet of the sleeper with the umbrella, by Joe, who took quite an interest in these proceedings for the rude awakening of his subordinate. The explosion followed in a few seconds, and the owner of the umbrella jumped up as if he'd been shot, rubbing his eyes, and demanding vehemently a reply to the question, "Who the —— fired that infernal blast?"

On catching sight of Bunton and Joe looking over the margin, however, and laughing at him heartily, he understood the state of affairs, and settled himself

promptly for another nap, after saying, "Good morning, sir," to Bunton, and volunteering an unnecessary falsehood to the effect that he had never closed his eyes for a second since going down.

"So this is your ground, then?" asked Cormack, pointing to the claims below them; "well, I must say I should be extremely sorry to give forty thousand for it."

"Very likely; so should I," replied the doctor, "but then you see nobody is likely to ask you to give forty thousand for it. But, come along; let us go round to the washing-machine and see what they are doing there."

So saying, Bunton led the way to an iron shed and engine-house some little distance from the edge of the mine, where the diamondiferous soil was being worked up into a paste with water, in a machine like a huge open churn. The doctor and Solomon were working high ground, or what is generally known as the "yellow" stuff, in distinction to the "blue" found in the lower levels. The yellow, being very soft, is passed at once from the depositing-box into the washing-machine, in which it is thoroughly puddled by an arrangement of vertical iron prongs set on a wheel revolving slowly over a shallow iron pan containing the wash-dirt. The centrifugal current set up by these prongs causes the heavier portion of the wash to sink to the bottom of the pan, whence it is removed into a wooden box and rewashed by means of a hose through a series of graduated sieves, fixed in a rocking-frame. As each sieve is spouted with the hose, it is lifted out of

the frame, and its contents thrown on to the sorting-table.

Here the sorters go through the stuff with a piece of iron shaped something like a big knife-blade. The contents of the first two sieves require very little experience in sorting, since, to remain in either of them, a diamond must be so large that it would catch the eye of the merest novice before the sieve was reversed on the sorting table. The small stuff, however, needs the very greatest care in going over; and it is a very sharp pair of eyes indeed that does not occasionally pass a little one. This fine stuff is generally put into an ordinary circular hand-sieve, a spadeful at a time, and shaken up and down and spun round in a tub of water, the circular motion producing the same result on a small scale as that effected by the washing-machine, and throwing all the heavier matter to the centre at the bottom of the sieve. The sieve is then reversed quickly, by a dexterous motion of the arms, upon the sorting-table, upon which its contents fall exactly to its shape, the heavy stuff being massed together in a dark-coloured ring in the middle. This is where diamonds must be looked for. The dark colour of the deposit is due to the presence of garnets, carbons, and other heavy matter; and small chips of malachite, mica, and other shining morsels are always found amongst them. The sorter takes his iron blade, which is usually galvanized to avoid rust, and very carefully scrapes over the top layer of the heap in front of him. Anything sparkling is picked up on the point of the sorting-iron, and, if a diamond, transferred to his mouth. Pieces of quartz of

various degrees of whiteness often deceive the sorters, who term them *Dutchmen* in contempt, and usually damn them very cordially, into the bargain, as they throw them away. Sorting is the most interesting of all work connected with diamond mining; but it is terribly trying to the eyes.

Bunton, having explained this process of washing and sorting to his friend, led him to the sorting-table, a few yards from the washing-machine, where a couple of coloured boys were pretending to be very hard at work, second-sorting what had been swept off the table after the last wash-up. Joe, Bunton's manager, came up as they were looking at the two youngsters, and taking the doctor aside, said—"About that whim, doctor? I've tinkered and patched at it till I can do no more; and, by rights, it ought not to be working now. It ain't safe."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"Well, doctor, you see, I thought as we'd been doing very well"—and he smiled—"for some time past, it would be advisable to go in for steam. You see them beggars will talk. I try to bluff them by hauling short loads, so as to rattle the tubs up sharper; but it's no darned use at all. They keep tally of every tub that comes up; and they're always sneaking around the washing-machine on our days." (The doctor hired the washing gear two days a week.)

"Why don't you order them off, then?"

"That cock won't fight, sir. I've tried it. And that there long 'Merican chap, he says—'Say, stranger, have you struck the original I. D. B. cemetery; or how is it that you find such a thunderin' heap of gouivas in your

ground?' That's what I call putting it straight—a darned sight too straight, if you ask me."

"Yes; that is certainly unpleasant," assented Bunton; "but what would it cost to substitute steam for horse-power?"

"Well, sir," replied Joe, pleased at the chance of carrying his point, "Hampton has shown me a nice little eight-horse Robey that would just suit. I could fix the whole job up capitally inside of five hundred; and we could go on working with the whim until the other gear was ready."

"Five hundred, eh? Very well. Tell Hampton—or no, I'll see him myself, and get him to send the engine down at once. When are you going to wash up?"

"I was only waiting for you or Mr. Davis to come down, sir; we can begin at once."

Bunton called Cormack over and introduced Joe to him as his manager, and the trio proceeded to the washing-machine, which was at once stopped, and preparations made for the important process of washing up.

What Joe's surname might have been, supposing him to have possessed one, nobody ever knew; and Joe himself was either unwilling or unable to impart any information on the subject. He had come up to the Fields in the early days, and had dug on the Vaal River, and at each of the dry diggings in succession, with what luck was known to no one but himself. His appearance was peculiar, and decidedly the reverse of prepossessing. Standing barely over five feet in his stockings, his shoulders and chest would have looked

out of proportion on a spare man of six feet ; while his arms were those of a giant. His legs were very much bowed, unequal in length, and absurdly short, and his walk reminded one more of the gait of a penguin than that of a human being. And yet, in spite of this malformation of his supporters, he could distance some of the smartest runners on the Fields. His face was furrowed with scars in all directions ; one eye had been completely obliterated by an explosion of dynamite ; and his nose—or rather the remains of it—was so broken and battered that he would have looked better without it altogether.

He had come through more accidents, and suffered more injury in fights and rows than any man on the Fields. The very day he landed, a stranger to the country, in Capetown, he was arrested on a charge of murder committed somewhere up country, and it was six weeks before he succeeded in proving the case to be one of mistaken identity. He determined on celebrating his release from the Capetown gaol in the usual time-honoured fashion ; and in course of a dispute in which he found himself involved at one of the low drinking dens which abound in the South African metropolis, he was shot through the chest in mistake for a man whom he was defending. That laid him on his back for three months, and left him with a damaged lung, which took years to heal.

Thinking that luck was against him, he left Capetown, and tried digging on the Vaal River, selecting one of the islands as his basis of operations. He always worked without partners, and lived by himself on his

island, employing two or three niggers to assist in digging. One night, about six months after he had located there, a tremendous thunderstorm came on. His hut, a flimsy construction, was struck by lightning, and burnt to the ground, he having a very narrow escape. He lay down in the open under a blanket and went to sleep in the philosophical manner which was part of his nature. During the night the river came down with a rush, as it often does after heavy storms, submerged his island, and washed him three miles down the current before he could make the bank. His mining tools, diamonds, money, in fact all his worldly possessions, were hopelessly gone.

Joe rubbed his head, dried his clothes, tramped in to Kimberley—or New Rush as it was then called—and took work in the mine at two pounds a week and his “tucker.” In those days the mine was intersected by narrow, treacherous ridges, facetiously denominated roadways. Joe was standing on one of these a few days after he had taken work in the mine, watching a Dutchman dry-sorting at a table in the claims, seventy feet below him. A Scotch cart came along, and Joe moved nearer to the edge to allow it to pass him. As he did so, the soft ground crumbled under his feet and he fell, turning a complete somersault in his fall, crash through the Dutchman’s sorting-table, in the planks of which his legs were jammed so fast that the wood had to be cut away with axes before his mangled lower portion could be released. Both hips were broken in the sockets, and the bones forced upwards till they penetrated the skin; his feet and legs were cut to

ribbons, and the bones mashed and splintered in the most horrible manner.

But Joe survived these injuries, although it was nine months before he could move his battered frame about on crutches. The Dutchman met him hobbling about one day, and wanted him to pay for the destruction of the sorting-table. Joe paid him on the spot, in full, with the end of his right-hand crutch, and the Dutchman went into hospital for a fortnight with a broken skull.

Minor accidents, such as being blown up, tumbling out of tubs, being knocked over by broken hauling wires, run over by carts and tram-trucks, Joe had experienced in plenty, but he never troubled himself about such trifles. He had a theory that bones once broken seldom break the second time; and as pretty well every important bone in his anatomy had been very thoroughly smashed, he considered that he was entitled to tumble about and be knocked down with impunity for the future.

Heath used to declare that Joe had never come into the world after the manner affected by ordinary humanity, but that he had been put together piecemeal from the remains of a bad railway accident, and that his constructors had made a shocking bad selection of the members at their disposal. People laughed at his incongruous proportions, and called him "Quasimodo" behind his back; but no one ever ventured on such a liberty to his face, good-tempered though he was generally credited with being.

Bunton had fallen across him doing some dangerous.

reef contracting, a few weeks after purchasing the ground which he and Solomon were working, and had at once formed a high opinion of his capabilities as a miner. As he became better acquainted with him he began to realize the true value of the man as a trustworthy, silent servant, and he engaged him as manager, at a salary which would have made the detectives open their eyes ; with the addition of a handsome commission on the finds.

Joe, and a couple of overseers in the claims, were the only white men employed by the partners. The overseers were simply kept on for the sake of appearances ; for, as the astute reader has doubtless already guessed, the ground in Old de Beer's was only being worked as a medium through which the results of vast transactions in illicit—or, in plain English, stolen—diamonds were shipped home, or disposed of on the local market.

Now-a-days the diamond laws are more stringent, and more strictly administered than was the case a few years ago ; and though there is quite as much diamond stealing going on now, the comparative values of ground in the various mines are known so accurately that a digger, whose finds range much higher than the ground he is working is estimated to yield, will at once be marked as an I. D. B., and a fit subject for the operations of the traps of the Detective Department, who are tolerably certain to catch him tripping sooner or later. But Bunton and Solomon had played their cards well, hitherto ; and with the exception of Joe, and the scoundrels from whom he and they bought stolen stones, whose necks were all of course in the same halter, no one was actually in the secret.

Neighbouring claim-holders who worked harder and with better appliances than Joe, sometimes wondered at his marvellous good fortune as compared with their own want of luck ; and would occasionally make half-playful, half-spiteful references to I. D. B. as the only possible explanation of the mystery. But nothing ever came of these innuendos. All the best of the diamonds purchased by the doctor and his partner, both illicitly and "on the square," were shipped to a certain well-known firm in Hatton Garden, who got splendid prices and asked no questions, though they charged an unusually high commission for their services.

The diamonds passed through the banks' hands for insurance, but the banks asked no questions in those days ; nor do I think they are over particular now, so long as the transactions be profitable. Indeed it is asserted that large advances have been made by the banks on parcels of stolen diamonds, and on other securities, to persons who were well known to be buying stolen stones in large quantities. Possibly it may not have been the duty of the banks to know what everybody else was cognizant of ; at any rate it did not appear to suit them to know it. If they did, it made no difference to their style of doing business.

Bunton and Davis, as a firm, stood well with the two banks which they favoured with their custom ; the account of the diamond buying business being kept with one bank, and the mining account at another. They discounted largely at times ; but their paper was invariably at short dates, and their acceptances were always promptly met. At irregular intervals they drew con-

siderable sums in gold, but this excited no suspicion, as they accounted for it by referring to an unusually heavy week's wages in the claims, a subject on which both the bank managers were profoundly ignorant. In short, the doctor and his young colleague, although they were acting as the principals of an organized gang of thieves, held their heads with the highest in Kimberley, and were generally spoken of as devilish decent sort of fellows, whose heads were as level as most men's, and who thoroughly deserved the success they were so rapidly achieving.

Bunton had been elected a member of the Gordon Club, then looked upon as a somewhat exclusive institution, which numbered on its list all the professional men—doctors, lawyers, engineers, and regular parsons—and most of the wealthier diggers, merchants, and diamond buyers of the Fields. A considerable proportion of these gentlemen were more or less intimately connected with the traffic in stolen diamonds, but the fact of their being members of the Gordon Club was quite sufficient to throw a cloak over any shortcomings in that direction; and no one abused the I. D. B.s more consistently and in more violent language than these persons were in the habit of indulging in over the Club dinner-table or in the card-room.

Solomon had not aspired as yet to membership of this aristocratic retreat. Some of the older and more particular members entertained a certain prejudice against persons of Hebrew race; and though many Israelites belonged to the Club, Solomon was wise enough not to run the risk of being pillled.

To return, however, to Bunton and his factotum Joe, whom we left with Cormack at the washing-machine. The occupation of washing up, already described, occupied about a couple of hours. The Captain took a hand at the sorting-table, and to his intense delight found two perfect white stones of four and six carats—which Bunton threw into the sieve when he wasn't looking—and about twenty carats of smaller stuff. The doctor put the diamonds into a silver snuff-box which he carried for that purpose; and they drove back to Kimberley taking Joe with them. At Hampton's store they dismounted, and Bunton purchased the hauling-engine and some other necessary gear, giving his cheque for the amount like a millionaire.

An adjournment to the Gordon Club close by naturally followed this important transaction, Joe being left to superintend the removal of the engine. The Captain was introduced by Bunton to several of the members, and asked to tiffin, in the course of which repast he exerted his powers of fascination with considerable effect upon his neighbours at table, one of whom insisted on proposing and another on seconding him for membership. Bunton nodded in response to the Captain's slightly raised eyebrows, and the veteran accepted the honour very gracefully. After a cigar and a soda-and-brandy in the smoking-room, the two friends strolled up to the doctor's house in Currey Street, where they found Solomon asleep on one sofa, Caldecott on another, and Hayes making violent love to the housekeeper in the pantry, from which he beat a hurried and undignified retreat when Bunton opened the glass door

which separated that department of his quarters from the passage.

It is the fashion, in the hot weather, on the Fields to take a siesta after tiffin; and Bunton and Cormack being hot and tired, and none the more inclined to be wakeful for the wine they had imbibed at tiffin, repaired to their bedrooms and followed Solomon's example.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEPARTURE

IT may easily be imagined that with such important interests at stake as those involved in the transactions of the firm of which Captain Cormack now found himself actually, though not nominally, a member, he had but little leisure or inclination to attend to his pupils; and these two young gentlemen were left, for the most part, to amuse themselves as they listed, a liberty of which they very soon learnt to avail themselves to an extent which would have considerably astonished and horrified General Hayes and Mr. Monkton, if they had known anything at all about it.

Being liberally supplied with money, and game for any amusement—a term which, with them, usually meant mischief—that might offer, they rapidly made friends amongst the younger members of the community, most of whom were quite as wild, though without such considerable means of paying for their folly as Hayes and Caldecott possessed. Pigeon matches, billiard handicaps, so-called hunting trips, on which they would sometimes be away for a week or ten days, were their favourite modes of killing time by day. At night they were generally to be found playing nap or loo at the

quarters of one of their young friends, or spending the time and their cash at hazard or faro in one of the numerous gambling-hells which then abounded in Kimberley. The front-door of the house in Currey Street was left open, as a rule, unless any special business was in hand, all night long ; and neither Cormack nor Bunton ever troubled to ask the young men what time they came in. Indeed, as they very seldom put in an appearance at breakfast, the other occupants of the house generally met them for the first time at tiffin, by which hour they had usual'y contrived, by the aid of repeated doses of soda-and-brandy, to get over the effects of the previous night's dissipation.

Solomon, however, began to suspect how things were going ; and his suspicions were at length converted into certainty, when Hayes one morning came into his room, looking thoroughly washed-out and miserable, and asked for the loan of a couple of hundred pounds, which he acknowledged to have lost at hazard the previous evening. The unfortunate youngster explained that he would attain his majority in the course of a few weeks, when he would be able to draw as much as he liked.

Solomon, after thinking a few minutes, lent him the money, and another hundred besides, taking his I. O. U. dated the day after his twenty-first birthday, for five hundred, just as a matter of form, as he explained ; and making him promise solemnly never to divulge the transaction to Caldecott, Bunton, or Cormack. This was the commencement of a series of similar transactions ; and by the time Hayes was of age, his paper in Solomon's

hands represented a very considerable sum of money, and a rate of interest which would have made even a Kimberley bank manager gasp and his mouth water.

Caldecott, whose health was rapidly failing again under the strain to which he subjected himself, before long came to Solomon as a suppliant also ; and he was soon involved to almost as large an extent as his friend.

Meanwhile things were prospering apace with the firm. Cormack took no active part in its operations. But as he had now become one of the most popular members of the club, and was intimate with the heads of the Government Departments, the members of the Mining Board, Vigilance Committee, and, in fact, with most of the leading men in the place, he contributed immensely to the respectability of his more energetic partners ; and was well situated for catching the whispers with regard to suspected persons, and coming attempts at trapping, which in those days, somehow or other, used to evade the vaunted secrecy of the Detective Department, and met men's ears mysteriously in the sanctum of the Gordon Club.

From eleven till twelve in the morning the Captain was generally to be seen reading the papers in a cosy arm-chair to the right of the mantelpiece in the reading-room ; and five o'clock in the afternoon usually found him in the same place, or standing at the bar taking a sherry-and-bitters or split with one of his numerous friends. He had given up gambling, as he understood the term ; though he often joined in a game of whist or nap for points which he would have thought beneath

his attention a year before. But he belonged to a firm now who were gambling on a much higher scale and for far larger and more certain winnings than any game at cards could ever bring him ; and he lost or won his paltry stakes at cards with an equanimity which was really beautiful to look upon.

I. D. B.s seem always to look upon their nefarious calling as a game of chance. They stake their liberty for from five to ten (fifteen now) of the best years of their existence against a fortune. If they are trapped and convicted—well and good, luck was against them, and they lost the game. If not, their luck is to thank for it.

As for regarding illicit diamond buying as a crime, it would be as hopeless to get even the least corrupted of them to look at it in that light, as to attempt to make them disgorge their hidden gains when they are caught. And there must be a wonderful fascination about this dealing in stolen diamonds, a fascination which those who have never participated in the fabulous profits it yields find it impossible to understand. The rule appears to be : once an illicit, always an illicit. And there are many well-known cases in which I. D. B. convicts have gone back to their besetting sin on the very day—or rather night—they were released from prison.

For some months everything went on swimmingly with the doctor and his two allies. Diamonds fell in price, till honest diggers found it better policy to allow their claims to stand idle than to continue working them at a loss. Yet Joe kept pegging away at the ground in Old de Beer's, where he had now got a

first-class steam hauling and washing plant in capital order ; and the finds, or supposed finds, amply justified him in doing so.

"Bunton's luck" came to be a stereotyped formula for any unaccountable piece of good fortune ; and Joe's neighbours used to joke him about an imaginary contract with the Prince of Darkness. The diamond buying business prospered amazingly, in spite of the continued drop in prices ; and was rapidly becoming one of the most important in Kimberley. Solomon's judgment came to be so highly esteemed that he was employed by some of the largest diggers to value and get up their parcels for shipment ; and the banks and insurance offices frequently availed themselves of his services in the same direction. In short, the wicked were flourishing like the most vigorous of green bay trees ; and making to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness at a rate never dreamt of by the formulator of that ancient but expressive phrase.

Yet, in spite of all this prosperity and the fact that they lived like the proverbial fighting cock, taking holidays when it suited them, and denying themselves nothing in the shape of luxury that money could possibly procure, there were times when Bunton's face assumed a weary, anxious expression that augured ill for his peace of mind. Cormack, who really knew scarcely anything of the details of the nefarious transactions in which Solomon and Bunton were involved, though, of course, he perfectly comprehended that the continued improvement in their financial position was due neither to honest digging nor straightforward

dealing, was as happy as the day was long, and never noticed the troubled look which now and then crept over his friend's face. Solomon, however, being, like most of his race, naturally apt at physiognomy, noticed the frequent change in the doctor's expression, but said nothing. Still things went on pleasantly enough to all appearances ; and still the profits of the firm increased.

One morning, Solomon, who usually called early at the post-office for letters, produced an envelope at breakfast, directed to himself in a huge, scrawling, unsteady hand, and bearing the Port Elizabeth post-mark. "Guess who that's from," said he, tossing it across the table to Bunton, who was making a feeble assault upon a grilled Namaqua partridge opposite.

"Port Elizabeth? Hum. Oh, I suppose it's your future father-in-law, old what's his name. Ay, Blowser."

"Quite correct. He's coming up to pay us a visit. And who do you think he's bringing with him?"

"The adorable Fanny?"

"Right again ; the adorable Fanny is the coming trouble. What shall I do? I think I'll emigrate to the convalescent home at Barkly, on a fever ticket, till the coast's clear," said Solomon, assuming an expression of dire misery. "I'm afraid my letters to the dear girl have been very few and far between lately ; and so, I suppose, she's coming to fan the expiring flame—I'm not very sure that it isn't extinguished altogether—into a similitude of incandescence again."

"Similitude of incandescence is good, Solomon : where did you raise it?" asked Cormack, who had just come in.

"Borrowed it from an electric light company's prospectus," replied Mr. Davis. "But, seriously, what is to be done? Am I to remain here and stand a siege, and then capitulate with the best grace possible, on terms to be arranged between the venerable butter-firkin and my guardians, Messrs. Cormack and Bunton? Or shall I beat a precipitate retreat to Barkly, or the Coast, or the deuce? In other and more expressive words, shall I do a guy? I should like to do a guy, I think."

"Solomon, my dear boy, let me beg of you, once for all, to remember the social and financial position of the firm of which you have the honour to be so important a member, and to abandon that most reprehensible habit of talking slang: and such slang! Where on earth could you possibly have contracted it?" asked Bunton.

"Imbided it with my mother's milk in Pilomet—Petticoat Lane in your vulgar tongue," laughed Solomon. "But you must admit, doctor, that it isn't often I relapse into the expressive language of my early youth."

"Oh, he is only chaffing, Sol; don't take any notice of him," said Cormack, who was endeavouring to spoil his appetite by reading the leading article in that morning's 'Diamond News,' which rested against the cruet-stand in front of him.

"Well, come, let us settle what is to be done about the Blowsers. One thing is certain; we can't offer to put them up here, although the people in Kimberley do some queer things in that line. I propose we engage

rooms for them at Mrs. Jardine's. That is the only place fit for a lady to stay at."

"Yes; that will be the best arrangement. When do you expect them?" asked Bunton, relapsing into his usual quiet manner.

"Why, let's see! This was posted, by the date on the letter, seven days ago. I shouldn't wonder if they're in this evening's coach. At any rate I'll run round to the 'Queen's' and fix their rooms."

"So do, my boy," said Cormack, "I'll wait here for you, as I want to talk over an idea that has got itself into my head, and Bunton has enough to think about without my worrying him with what may be, after all, not worth wasting breath over."

Solomon returned from his errand in the course of a few minutes, and found the Captain still poring over his paper at the breakfast-table, which had not been cleared. Bunton had gone down to the office. Cormack looked up as Solomon entered, and motioned to him to take the seat opposite.

"Now, before I divulge the idea with which I have been smitten," said Cormack, "I want you to answer a few questions. I know, of course, that all is fair, square, and above-board between us as partners, though I know less of what concerns the partnership than either you or Bunton. It was agreed between us that I should not know more than was absolutely necessary; and I should be the last person to cavil at such an arrangement, especially when the peculiar circumstances of the case are taken into consideration. I mention this because I want you to understand that the information

I desire from you is not sought upon selfish or indeed personal motives at all. There are reasons why I ought to be informed, and I don't wish to worry Bunton, who seems a little down lately ; and so, my boy, I come to you."

"Go ahead, Captain," said Solomon, looking a little more inquisitive than usual, and lowering his eyes after a momentary glance into those of the Captain, which were good, fearless, well-opened eyes that might have belonged to the noblest of nature's noblemen.

"Well, then, I believe you are buying pretty largely from Michael Moss. Do you know that he is suspected by the detectives?"

"What a wonder! Ay, vi, what do you think?" ejaculated Solomon, falling back on Pilomet for his expletives. "Why, of course I know they suspect him. What is more, I'm beginning to suspect the beggar myself. In fact, I am almost sure he is robbing us."

"But, supposing he were trapped, say to-night, could he, in any way, connect you and Bunton with his transactions in stuff?"

"Certainly not. None of those fellows keep any real record of their sales and purchases ; or, if they do, it is kept in such a way that no one but themselves could possibly make it out. But Mike couldn't keep an account if he wanted to ; he can't write."

"Can't write! what nonsense! Why, he must be worth thousands."

"Very likely : only I don't think so. But he can't write for all that ; and worse—or better—than that, he can't read. One morning I happened to be at break-

fast late at Jones's down in the Pan, and Mike came in and took the seat opposite. He ordered his breakfast, and picked up the 'Independent,' which was lying on the table, and on everything else, as usual. I said, 'Good morning, Mike; you're later than usual, eh?' 'Yesh, Mishter Davish: de fact ish, I shlept over my-shelfsh.' 'Any news in the paper?' I asked presently. 'Dere nefer ish no bloomin' newsh in der plashtid papersh,' said he. He was holding the paper upside-down and pretending to read. Oh, no; there's no fear of anything leaking out through him if he's trapped. But they've tried to have him dozens of times. He is too smart for them, I think."

"May be so," said Cormack, "but I fancy they mean to try him again either to-night or to-morrow. I saw — and — whispering together last night at the Club, and distinctly caught Mike's name more than once. You might perhaps give him a hint?"

"Oh, yes; I'll give him a hint—with a hook," said Solomon, the last three words spoken too low for Cormack to hear.

"Well, so much for that matter," said Cormack, apparently pleased that he had relieved his mind. "Now there's another thing I want to ask you. You've heard this talk about the formation of companies in the Kimberley mines? Well, it strikes me there will be some tremendous hauls made over it. I heard last night that one company will issue their prospectus in a few days, and you may depend upon it that once they start forming companies, they won't stop till every inch in the mines has been floated. Now, it strikes me that

we could do very much better by employing our capital and—ahem—brains in the floating of joint stock enterprises than by risking it and our liberty—because there is a risk, and a big one—as we are doing at present. What do you think of it?”

“I agree with you, Captain,” replied Davis, thoughtfully, “but, you see, we have gone in for the ‘trade’ so heavily (I. D. B. is always so spoken of among its votaries), that it is impossible for us to withdraw from it all of a sudden. We should be rounded on at once, and half-a-dozen witnesses are a very different affair to one. So long as Bunton and I remain in Griqualand West, we must buy whatever our men bring us, whether we want it or not. Bunton and I have had many conversations on the subject, and the only way to manage it that we can think of, is for him to take a trip home on the score of ill health—you know he has been seedy lately—then I must go down to the Colony on some pretext or other, say to marry Miss Blowser—not that I mean matrimony if I can help it—and leave you here to run the company business. Then as regards the diamond business, I have a plan for getting rid of that and making a good thing at the same time. You know your two pupils, or wards, or whatever you call them, are both now of age; and from what they tell me, can command a big pile between them. Both of them have become inveterate gamblers since they have been here, young Hayes especially; and now that he has command of money, he is beginning to despise cards and dice, and wants to go in for something worth while. In fact, he wants us to take him into partnership. I fancy he half

suspects the truth about our business. Of course the idea of taking him in could not be entertained for a moment. But how would it be to sell the business to the two of them as a going concern? He is very sweet upon it."

"Hum; damn it, that's a deuced bright idea. I tell you what, my boy, that's the key of the position, as we used to say in the service," replied Cormack.

"Bunton is in favour of the plan too," said Solomon; "but it will have to be very carefully worked. He thinks, and so do I, that nothing should be attempted till he is out of the way. You see, you are not known, even to them, as a partner in the concern. Bunton's illness, and my marriage—ahem—can be used as pretexts for wishing to dispose of it; and you can easily persuade them to pay any price we may fix upon. Of course they will come to grief almost as soon as they start; but that is no affair of ours."

"I'm afraid the thing bears an unpleasantly strong resemblance to a most infernal piece of villainy," laughed Cormack; "but business is business, and this will be very good business for us if you succeed in putting it through. Well, I think I'll stroll down to the Club for an hour. Don't forget about Mike," and he left the room.

Solomon sat with his head in his hands, deep in thought, for fully half an hour after his friend had departed; then he jumped up, put his hat on, went down to the cab-stand in Main Street, and selecting his favourite Jehu demanded to be deposited in Dutoitspan with what celerity might be convenient.

After making several calls amongst the Pannites, Solomon borrowed a buggy from a friend and drove out alone in the direction of Scholtz's Nek, a narrow pass some miles from camp, on the main road from the Colony. The Nek, from a landscape-painter's point of view, was little more tolerable to the eye than the flat, dreary country in the midst of which it is situated. But Solomon was no judge of landscape, and had something very different to painting in his thoughts as he drove through the narrowest part of the road for the third time, carefully noting the surroundings and saying to himself, "Beautiful! just the thing! Couldn't have been better if it had been made to contract!"

Presently he took out his watch, turned his horse's head, and trotted back to the Pan, where he handed over the buggy to its owner, stating that he had been out to look at a prospecting party who were working for him a few miles out of camp. He then jumped into a cab, returned to Kimberley, and spent a couple of hours in the diamond office before tiffin, after which he took the cart belonging to the firm and drove down to Alexandersfontein to meet the coach, which arrived, as usual, about a couple of hours behind time.

Miss Blowser, who seemed quite overcome at sight of Solomon, and her father were transferred to the cart, and Solomon drove them up to Kimberley in gallant style, reaching the 'Queen's Hotel' before the lumbering old coach had left Dutoitspan. Miss Fanny and her father were thoroughly tired out, and retired to lie down for an hour or two soon after arriving at the hotel. Solomon repaired to the house in Currey Street,

and informed the partners of their safe arrival; and then the three set to work to discuss the doctor's trip home and other important matters.

It was arranged, at length, that as nothing could possibly be gained by delay, he should start in a couple of days' time for Graaff Reinet, travelling in his own cart, and accompanied by Caldecott, who declared that he wanted a trip to the coast. The whole of the next day Solomon and Bunton were busily engaged putting matters in train for the latter's departure. They deputed Cormack and the two youngsters to make their excuses to the Blowsers, and to promise for them that they would do themselves the honour of calling the next day. By noon everything was ready for Bunton's trip, and he and Solomon called on Mr. and Miss Blower and lunched with them.

It was arranged that Bunton and Caldecott should leave about seven in the evening and travel by moonlight, which is by far the best time for making a journey in Cape Colony during the hot months.

The cart came round to the door a few minutes past the hour appointed, and fully half an hour was spent in packing the doctor and Caldecott's numerous traps.

It was generally understood in camp that Bunton was going home in search of health; and quite an army of friends assembled to wish him a pleasant voyage and quick recovery. There was a good deal of champagne consumed; and as Bunton and Caldecott had to drink with almost every one, they were both flushed and excited when the final good-byes were said, and they mounted their cart a few minutes after eight o'clock.

Solomon, who had vanished for some few minutes, returned just as they were on the point of starting, and standing on the step of the cart, said adieu to its occupants in the most effusive manner.

At length they drove off, the driver cracking his long whip after the insane manner common to all coloured Jehus, and making his horses fly about and the cart jolt in a way that was anything but pleasant for its occupants. Cormack, Hayes, and Solomon watched them until they were hidden by a cloud of dust, and then re-entered the house, Cormack remarking aside to Solomon, "So far, so good."

"Very good indeed," replied Solomon, smiling slightly.

CHAPTER XV.

A BLACK NIGHT'S WORK

THE horses soon settled down into a steady trot ; and, avoiding Dutoitspan, the driver took the road through Buetfontein and soon reached Alexandersfontein, where a halt was made to arrange the luggage, tighten up the harness, and have a final drink before settling for the night's journey. The moon was just beginning to show her light over the low ridge of hills to their left, as they left Alexandersfontein and turned into the main road again. The road was in good order, and the horses stepped out merrily until they reached the rising ground at the entrance to the Nek, where, not only is the gradient a stiff one, but the road is full of ruts, stones, and holes.

Both Bunton and Caldecott were feeling rather drowsy by this time ; and the driver, who had partaken pretty liberally of Cape smoke, both before starting and at Alexandersfontein, was holding his reins very loosely and keeping anything but a bright look-out.

Suddenly, the horses stopped, or rather were thrown back on their haunches with such violence that the driver was thrown right out of the cart almost over their heads. As he reached the ground he received a heavy

blow on the head, which would have broken any white man's skull, and effectually stunned him.

Three men in long black cloaks, which completely concealed their figures, and with their faces entirely hidden by crape masks, sprang into the cart; and seizing Bunton and Caldecott, began to pinion them. Caldecott, being weak and in bad health, offered little or no resistance; but with the doctor it was quite another matter. He struggled and fought till he managed to wrench himself out of the grasp of the two miscreants who had hold of him; and the jerk which set him free sent him tumbling out of the cart on to the ground. He was on his feet in a moment, and the next saw his revolver pointed towards one of the men in the cart.

"Come out of that, you villains, or I'll,"— he began; but he never finished the sentence.

He had taken no notice of the man at the horses' heads, who had covered him with his pistol directly he rose from his fall, and fired just in time to save his comrades in the cart the risk of the plucky little doctor's bullet. Hearing the report, the ruffian who was holding Caldecott, imagining that it was the doctor who had fired, brutally threw him with all the strength he could muster from the cart to the ground, upon which he fell with a dull, sickening thud, which suggested some shocking internal injury.

Presently, one of the doctor's late captors, who had been examining the body, said, "Well, this one's a dead un, at any rate; how's t'other?"

Bunton had been shot right through the head, and presented an awful sight, the ball having torn away the

left orbit, and a great portion of that side of the forehead. Caldecott was lying huddled up in a heap, just as he had fallen, with blood oozing from mouth, nose, and ears.

One of the gang bent down and felt for his pulse, and then tried over his heart :—" He's a goner too, I guess," said the brute, getting up ; " and now for the nigger."

" Damn the nigger!" shouted he after a while ; " I'll be burnt if he hasn't hooked it!"

" Why, I thought I hit him hard enough to kill an ox," said the man, who was still holding the horses' heads.

" You're always thinking, you infernal fool," snarled one of the others.

" Well, we can't stay cursing each other here," said he who appeared to be chief of the gang : " come, pitch 'em into the cart, and we'll drive down the first side-road we come to and see about the swag ; come, hurry up, boys!"

The two bodies were thrown into the bottom of the cart, and the four brutes, after throwing some sand over the blood in the road, mounted, and drove away as if the fiend himself were after them ; as indeed, may very likely have been the case. They went through the Nek like the wind ; and as soon as they reached the level beyond, turned out of the road, and drove some five or six hundred yards across the veldt. They then dismounted and commenced a minute search of the bodies of Bunton and Caldecott, and the luggage.

Nothing except a few muttered oaths escaped their lips for some time ; but at length the ringleader shouted, " Here they are, boys : I've got them!"

He held Bunton's waistcoat in his left hand, and in his right six small parcels carefully stitched up in chamois leather. The others at once abandoned their search and examined the packets, but without offering to open them.

The next question that arose was how to dispose of the cart and horses, and their shocking burden. It did not take long to decide this. The two bodies were carried to a spot a few yards off, where there was a deep furrow washed out of the sand by some by-gone thunder-storm, and thrown carelessly into it, with all the baggage, for the robbers had touched nothing but the loose notes, gold, and silver, and the six little packets in the doctor's vest. Then they drove back into the main road, and back through the greater part of the length of the Nek, jumped out of the cart, and giving the horses a few good cuts with their riding-whips, sent them galloping like mad things back towards Kimberley.

Their next proceeding was to regain their own horses—for they were all mounted—which were hidden among the rocks near which the murders had been committed. Each man divested himself of his cloak and mask, and hid them in his clothes—there seemed to be a certain distaste to exposing their faces to each others' gaze, but it had to be done—mounted his horse, and left; each starting a few minutes behind his predecessor, and each taking a different direction. Before starting, the chief of the gang admonished them to be on the look-out for "that b——d nigger," and settle him, should they be lucky enough to overtake him.

Cormack and Solomon Davis were sitting under the

verandah in Currey Street, enjoying a comfortable cigar and iced soda-and-brandy, about an hour after Bunton and Caldecott had left, when Joe walked through the little white gate at the end of the so-called garden, and came up to them with his hands in his pockets—"Evenin', Mr. Solomon; evenin', Captin'. Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Them d——d D.s has got Mike Moss at last."

"Is that all?" said Solomon, apparently much relieved; "serve the idiot right. He's been warned often enough. You needn't worry about him, Joe."

"I'm sure I'm uncommon glad to hear it, sir; but I was wondering how it might affect us; and I thought it best to come up at once and tell you."

"It don't matter a pin to us, one way or the other," said Solomon. "And now that your mind is at rest on that point, sit down and have something cool; it's a terribly hot night."

Joe, nothing loth, accepted the invitation; and the three sat smoking and sipping iced drinks very pleasantly until about ten o'clock, when the manager rose, shook out his pipe, and said he must be moving homewards towards de Beer's. Cormack, however, pressed him to take a nightcap, and while he was compounding the beverage, Solomon walked down to the gate and stood looking into the now almost deserted street. Presently a loud rattling noise struck his ears; and turning to the others on the stoep, he called out—"Here! come and look here! It seems to me here's a runaway, or something gone wrong."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when a

pair of horses, with flaming eyes and covered from head to foot with great flakes of white foam, dashed up and stopped, shivering with terror and excitement, in front of the gate. Behind them was a cart battered and scratched so as to be almost unrecognizable as such. Joe jumped over the low fence and caught the horses by the bridle, just as Solomon exclaimed, in a voice of wonder and horror combined—"Cormack, Cormack, for God's sake come here! It's our own cart! What in God's name can have happened?"

The Captain was at his side in a moment; and after glancing over the shattered wreck of the cart and examining the harness, he said—"By Jove, you're right, Solomon; it is our cart, sure enough. But what the devil can have happened to them?"

"It looks to me as if they have had a capsize, and then let the horses bolt while they were packing the cart again," said Solomon, who had now got into the cart and was examining the box under the back seat which had been overlooked by the robbers in their haste. "See, here's everything in the cart-box just as we put it in," said he, "except that the bottles and glasses are all broken."

"Yes; no doubt that is what has happened," said the Captain; "but what's to be done now?"

"I think we'd better outspan these poor brutes before we do anything else, sir," said Joe, still at the horses' heads. "They'll drop down if we keep them here much longer."

So they took the horses out, and led them round to the stable at the back of the house, where Joe and the

kitchen-Loy rubbed them down and gave them a hot mash with some brandy mixed with it. The remains of the cart were then pulled into the yard, and the consultation was renewed. It was soon arranged that they should take another cart and drive along the road to see if they could discover anything of the missing party. Joe was despatched to hire a cart and horses, and soon came back with a capital turn-out from a neighbouring livery-stable. It was decided that, considering the speed at which the affrighted horses would be sure to return, the accident must have happened some distance from camp; and that it would probably be some time before the following cart would come up with the doctor and Caldecott.

This being the case, Cormack resolved to remain at home to look after affairs on the spot, and in case the others should return by another route, and so miss the relief party. Solomon and Joe got into the cart, and made the best of their way to Alexandersfontein, stopping at several places on the road, at some of which they obtained information that a pair of horses, drawing an empty cart, had passed at a furious pace earlier in the evening. At Alexandersfontein they heard that the travellers had called and had some refreshment, and one of the people about the place said he had noticed that the driver appeared somewhat the worse for liquor. No one here had seen anything of the cart returning, but that might easily be accounted for on the supposition that the horses had come across the veldt, where they were accustomed to run when not wanted in Kimberley, or when the other pair were working.

The moon was shining brightly when Solomon and Joe reached Scholtz's Nek, and they drove through it slowly, and out on the level road beyond ; but without seeing any signs of a capsized. Mile after mile they travelled along, making inquiries at such of the farm-houses whose inmates condescended to reply to their summons ; but nowhere could they obtain any intelligence of their predecessors.

At length Solomon said, "I can't make this out at all, Joe, unless they got another cart somewhere, and went on. But I don't think it is any use for us to go further. We may as well turn back."

"Just what I was thinking, sir," said Joe, who was completely puzzled. "I dare say the doctor is all right, and will have a fine laugh at us for running this wild-goose chase after him, when he hears about it."

"Ay, no doubt he will," said Solomon, with a little shiver. "Turn round, Joe, and let's get back as soon as possible."

Before they reached Kimberley a heavy thunderstorm broke, and the rain fell in torrents. Solomon had never got over his terror of lightning, but to-night he appeared quite indifferent to the hissing flashes which kept striking all round them, and every now and then even drew an ejaculation from Joe. Perhaps Solomon was grateful for the rain ?

When they reached Kimberley, they found Cormack and Hayes asleep in the sitting-room ; and, of course, no intelligence of the doctor and his companion. Joe took the hired cart back to the livery-stables, saying he should walk down to de Beer's, as he could do no good

by remaining in Currey Street. Cormack and Hayes, who were thoroughly tired out, went to bed ; and Solomon, saying he would soon follow their example, went into the yard and began to examine the cart most minutely. The cushions were gone, and what little was left of the lining was so ripped and tattered that any marks or stains there might have been upon it before the accident were now completely obliterated. Upon the floor, however, which was painted a dark drab, Solomon found a number of thick spots, which on being rubbed with the moistened finger yielded a red tinge.

Taking a large bath sponge from his bedroom, Solomon went into the kitchen on tiptoe, and finding some warm water in a kettle, took it out and thoroughly washed the floor of the cart, and such other parts as might possibly be marked with blood. This took him some time, but he appeared to be in no hurry, and took no notice of the rain which fell heavily at intervals, though the storm was pretty well spent before it reached Kimberley. After satisfying himself, as well as he could in the dark, that the cart was thoroughly clear of blood-stains, he threw a few handfuls of dust and sand into it, washed his hands and sponge, and was just entering the house by the back-door, when a slight noise at the gate arrested him.

"Hist, Solomon ! is the coast clear ?" asked a voice in a hoarse whisper.

Solomon whispered, "All right ; come in ; be quick !"

And his brother Barney, dust-stained, and looking frightfully worn and haggard, came round to where he was standing.

"What has happened?" said Solomon, in a hardly audible whisper to his elder brother as they entered the kitchen where a lamp was burning.

"Happened! How do I know what has happened? Here are your cursed diamonds; give me the money and let me go," he answered fiercely.

Solomon took the six little wash-leather-covered packets from his brother, and looked at them long and carefully to assure himself that they had not been opened or tampered with in any way. Satisfied at length that they were all intact, he said, "wait," and leaving Barney in the kitchen, retired to his own room. He was not absent more than a few minutes. When he returned, he took three long rolls of paper from his pocket, and, placing them on the dresser before his brother, said—"There is a hundred in each of these; give one to each of your companions; and since you won't take a share in the stuff like a sensible man, here are three hundred in gold, and two hundred in notes for yourself."

"Solomon, you will have to double each of my pal's shares; there's been some cursed black work to-night, and they are all anxious to clear, before anything is discovered."

After a good deal of haggling, and many protestations on Solomon's part that he had no more gold in the house, Barney managed to squeeze another hundred pounds out of him to be divided amongst his accomplices, and took his leave, apparently well pleased to get out of reach of Solomon's eyes.

Left to himself, Solomon went into his bedroom,

locked the door, pulled up one corner of the carpet, dug his penknife into a board, and pulled up a piece about a foot long. Into the aperture thus formed he inserted his hand, and drew out a large leather pouch ; this he opened, slipped the six packets into it, returned it to its former resting-place, closed the piece of board over it, pulled back the carpet, and then undressed, went to bed, and slept like a top.

Barney met his associates in crime, distributed the blood-money, and then saddled his horse, and rode at the top of his beast's speed out of camp in the direction of Bloemfontein, never drawing rein till he was well on the way to Boshof, thirty odd miles from Kimberley.

The appearance of Mr. Barnet Davis on the scene has yet to be accounted for ; but, as he has no further part in our story, this may be done very briefly. Some three months before the shocking events recorded in the present chapter, Barney, who had been steadily going down-hill since we last met him, accidentally discovered his brother's whereabouts, and contrived, in one way and another, to raise funds to enable him to join him. On his arrival in Kimberley, Solomon gave him the cold shoulder ; and at first refused to have anything to say to him. At length, however, he considered it prudent to relent ; and provided Barney with an inconsiderable allowance, on the understanding that he went under an alias, and never attempted to claim relationship. Barney chafed under this treatment, but Solomon was master of the situation ; and at length, when the younger brother was casting about for a tool to carry out his horrible design against the unfortunate doctor,

he hit upon Barney, who consented to get together a gang and carry out the plot, with the result chronicled above.

Barney returned to England with his ill-gotten gains, and may be leading a respectable life there at this moment for all that is known to the contrary; though even the most impartial judge of his early life and character would probably feel inclined to admit that the chances are the other way.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GHASTLY DISCOVERY

CORMACK, who was a very heavy sleeper, awoke late the next morning with a confused sensation of something being wrong, but he couldn't for the life of him recollect what it was, till he had had his tub and swallowed a stiff brandy-and-soda. Then the events of the previous evening—so far as he had witnessed them—began to dawn upon him. Slipping on his dressing-gown, he went into the yard and found the housekeeper and kitchen-boy staring at the broken cart. On seeing him they retired to their own quarters, and he proceeded to examine it thoroughly all over.

While he was doing so, Solomon came up, and said, "Good morning, Captain. I suppose we shall hear something of those two this morning. By Jove, I'm afraid our poor old cart won't travel many more journeys. Why it will cost as much to have it repaired as to buy a new one."

"Oh, damn the cart!" said Cormack, pettishly. "I can't help wondering what can possibly have happened to Bunton and the youngster. Dick is a very careful fellow as a rule, and I cannot for the life of me comprehend his coming such a fearful mucker as this seems to

indicate," and he pointed to the broken cart. "It could hardly have been foul play. And yet, I don't know; there are plenty of men here ready to commit any crime in Christendom for a five-pound note. Had he any diamonds with him, Solomon?"

"Only a couple of small parcels of no great value, so far as I know," replied the other; "but you know he had a considerable amount in gold and notes; about five hundred, I think."

"Quite enough to tempt a thief," said Cormack, thoughtfully; "but then Dick was armed, and a better shot with a pistol never snuffed a candle. No; d—n me if I can understand it in the least."

Presently Hayes arrived on the scene, and the trio adjourned for breakfast. As above-mentioned, they were later than usual this morning; indeed it was close upon eleven o'clock when, as they were about to rise from the table, the knocker sounded, and Mr. and Miss Blowser were announced. They were at once made acquainted with the Captain's fears for his friends' safety, and proceeded to say all the civil things—Mr. Blowser extremely ungrammatical but even more earnest than usual—which the occasion appeared to demand.

Solomon just said good-day to the father and daughter and then relapsed into silence, much to the disgust of Miss Fanny, who endeavoured to revenge herself by being unusually gushing to young Hayes, who was not slow to follow her lead. Solomon, however, took no notice whatever of their "goings on," and speedily excused himself on a plea of pressing business, and walked off to his office.

He called at the post-office on his way and got his letters; but they lay on his desk unopened when Heath came in some half-hour afterwards. The American swung himself on to the counter in his usual free-and-easy manner, and leant over to slap Solomon on the shoulder, but Solomon declined the familiarity and drew back abruptly.

"Say, mister, my friend, what's gone back on you this morning?" demanded Heath, looking very much astonished.

"Oh, I'm a bit seedy, that's all. Don't worry, there's a good fellow," replied Solomon snappishly, leaning his head on his hand.

"Seedy, eh?" said Heath. "Well, come along round to Woodward's and join me in a small bottle. There's nothing like Pommery to wash the cobwebs out of your knowledge-box."

Solomon tried to excuse himself, but the mercurial American would hear of no denial; and so he closed his office-door, put the key in his pocket, and followed Heath to the 'Mining Board Bar,' which even at this early hour was full of customers, and doing a roaring business. A couple of glasses of iced champagne soon put Solomon into something like his usual spirits, and he and Heath adjourned to the billiard-room, where they sat chatting for nearly an hour.

Solomon at length got up to leave, but just as he was about to open the door, a man who was standing at the bar turned round and said, "I say, Davis, what's this about Bunton? I heard on the market this morning that his cart and horses came back late last night; the

cart smashed up and the horses nearly foundered. Is there any truth in it?"

In reply Solomon related the events of the previous evening, truthfully enough in the main, but not as if he were apprehensive that anything serious had happened. Bunton was well liked by all his associates, as most of those in the bar were, and they crowded round Solomon and questioned him, until he had told the whole story at least half-a-dozen times over.

While the affair was being canvassed, a police-sergeant put his head into the room and asked, "Is Mr. Davis here?"

"Here I am," answered Solomon, with a suspicion of tremor in his voice; "what do you want?"

"If you please, sir, the Chief told me to ask you to step down to the police station at once; something serious has happened to Doctor Bunton."

"Good God! what can it be? Of course, I'll come at once," replied Solomon, making for the door.

Most of the men in the bar and billiard-room followed him; and as they were joined by many others on the way down, he was accompanied by a crowd of quite imposing proportions by the time he reached the office of the Chief of Police, a dusty, hot little den, which might possibly hold half-a-dozen small men, but certainly not that number of big ones.

Solomon being admitted, the sergeant who had walked down with him closed the door and stood sentry over it, much to the disgust of the crowd, which proceeded to amuse itself with horse-play after the manner for which Kimberley crowds used to be celebrated.

Solomon's interview lasted so long, however, that the patience of those who were waiting to hear its result began to evaporate, and they gradually broke off in sections to the various bars in the vicinity, and settled down quietly to billiards and throwing dice for drinks as before. It was fully an hour before the door of the police-office opened and gave egress to the Chief himself and Solomon, whose face bore a white, scared look which indicated plainly that his interview had been an anything but pleasant one.

Heath was the only one of those who had followed him down who was still waiting, and he at once turned up towards him and asked what was amiss. Solomon was about to reply, when the Chief of Police, facing round on him sharply, rapped out, "Murder! That's what's amiss, Mr. Heath; and a very brutal murder too. You may tell your friends that much, but now I must trouble you not to follow us any further."

Heath, thus admonished, fell back, and gravitated naturally into the nearest saloon to retail his news, and take something to straighten him up after the shock he had experienced. In less than half an hour the intelligence that Bunton had been murdered was spread all over the camp; but as Heath was totally unacquainted with the details of the crime, his hearers cross-questioned him until he was fairly bullied into admitting many of their theories to be correct; and the consequence was that at least a dozen different versions of the affair were flying about before tiffin.

Meanwhile, Solomon and his companion reached the house in Currey Street; and Cormack, Hayes, and the

housekeeper, who was terribly cut up when she heard the news of the shocking death of her master, were questioned in turn by the Chief, as to the events of the previous evening. After this the cart was thoroughly examined by the official, who, if he did form any opinion from its appearance, very carefully kept his impressions to himself. It was over two hours before the household were relieved of his presence, with the promise of another visit on the morrow.

As the reader has probably surmised, the discovery of the murder was due to the cart-driver; who, although stunned for a minute or two by the heavy blow he had received from the man who stopped the horses, soon recovered his senses sufficiently to observe what was going forward, and to creep gradually and cautiously into the shadow of the rocks at the road-side. Here he crouched out of sight until the murderers drove off, when he crossed the track and struck off to the left. But he was too dizzy from the effects of the blow on his head to be able to walk; and as soon as he had put what he thought a safe distance between himself and the road, he lay down on the veldt till he should be sufficiently recovered to try and get into camp. He heard the cart and horses come tearing down the road again, and could tell by the way the cart was flying about that no one was driving. Then he saw the four murderers leave, one after another, on horseback; their cloaks and masks removed, but they were at too great a distance for him to be able to distinguish their faces or the colour of their horses. Then all was quiet.

It was a long while, some hours at least, before he

was able to set out again. He reached the road, and was picked up soon afterwards by a waggon loaded with fire-wood, and so brought into camp. His first proceeding was to go to the police-office and give full details of what had happened; while in the office he fainted twice; and as soon as he had completed his recital the Chief of Police, who, though strict, was a most humane, kind-hearted fellow, sent him to the hospital, where it was found that his skull was badly injured.

Thus it happened that Solomon knew nothing of his return until informed of it by the Chief of Police.

Cormack, who, though very far from being a good man, had nothing of the cold-blooded villain about him, was terribly affected by the news of the murder of the man who for years past had been his bosom friend and only confidant until he met Solomon. He was completely unmanned, and went about the house alternately swearing vengeance against the murderers and sobbing like a grief-stricken woman. And more than once he fell into an ungovernable rage with Solomon, and cursed him for a callous, hard-hearted brute for taking the matter so quietly. Poor Hayes was completely dazed, and wandered about, the picture of despair.

Solomon alone kept command of himself. He went down to the office and put up the shutters, had the blinds drawn at the house, and sent a tailor up to take orders for mourning. Then he repaired to the police-office, and drove out with the Chief to the scene of the murder, as determined by the driver's evidence. A detachment of police had been previously despatched to

the spot, and when Solomon and his companion arrived there they found that their predecessors had experienced no difficulty in discovering signs of the conflict; for such it appeared to have been from the marks on the road. But they had not been able to find the bodies, which the Chief felt positive could not be far from the scene of the murder. The heavy rain of the night before had almost obliterated the wheel-tracks; and subsequent traffic, of course, made their search for the route the cart had taken after the murder still more difficult. But the rain had laid bare the places where the robbers had thrown sand over the blood-marks, and the spot where poor Bunton had ground his heels into the earth in his death-agony was plainly visible. The mark of the bullet which had sent him to his final audit had also been discovered on a rock by the wayside; and beneath it, the flattened bullet itself and a splinter of blood-stained bone from the horrible wound it had caused.

The Chief did not waste much time over these ghastly discoveries. He gave the horses to one of his men to hold, and accompanied by Solomon and the rest of his subordinates proceeded up the road, carefully examining it for traces of the cart-spoor.¹ They walked slowly through the Nek and out on the level ground beyond, but failed to discover anything to guide them in their search for the bodies. At length they met a couple of Hottentots in charge of an empty waggon; and explaining what they wanted, took them back to the scene of the murder. The two boys examined the road carefully

¹ Spoor = track, Dutch.

on their knees for a few minutes, and then one of them jumped up and said in Dutch, "I have it, sir," and went off up the Nek at a pace which they had some difficulty in keeping up with. Without a single check he led them to where the cart had turned off into the veldt, and stopped at the spot where the baggage had been rifled and the bodies searched. Here they found some scraps of paper, part of the lining of Bunton's vest, and a few pieces of silver money which the thieves had let fall in their haste.

As soon as their examination of the place was finished, the Hottentot started again, and led them direct to the edge of the gulley, or donga, into which the bodies had been thrown. The rain had washed down a quantity of loose sand, and both bodies were completely enveloped in this natural winding-sheet. But the two boys jumped down into the trench, and removing a few handfuls of sand, exposed first one corpse and then the other to the horrified gaze of Solomon and the police.

The features of Caldecott were dreadfully distorted, and his pale, sickly face was stained with still humid gore. Bunton's countenance, with that fearful red cavern in the forehead, was altogether too ghastly a sight for Solomon's nerves to withstand, and throwing up his arms, with a piercing shriek, he fell forward into the gulley on to the bodies of his murdered friends.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BASKET OF GRAPES

IT was some time before Solomon recovered consciousness. As soon as he was able to travel, the Chief of Police drove him back to camp, leaving a couple of his men in charge of the bodies of Caldecott and Bunton, for which shells and a proper conveyance were despatched. Solomon was right glad to get home to Currey Street and lie down, after taking a strong glass of brandy; for what he had seen that afternoon had thoroughly shaken and sickened him. Cormack, of course, had to be told of the discovery of the bodies; and he, much to Solomon's relief, decided upon going down to the police station to await their arrival, Hayes accompanying him. Mr. Blowser called soon after they had left, and Solomon had to repeat the sickening details of the finding of the bodies for his satisfaction. Then Joe came up from de Beer's. In his own rough way Joe was very much attached to his late master, for such he had always considered him; although in reality Solomon had quite as much to say to the management of the claims in de Beer's as Bunton, and latterly, had assumed almost complete control of the illicit transactions which made those claims so lucrative. The manager

listened to Solomon's story without interrupting him; and when Solomon looked up at him, astonished at his silence, some minutes after he had finished speaking, he saw that the man's rough cheeks were wet with tears.

Joe dashed his sleeve across his eyes, ashamed of his weakness; and rising, struck the table savagely with his fist, saying—"A bloody murder! Yes, you're right, Mr. Solomon. God send I get first show at the accursed devils as done it! I suppose we'd better knock off work in the claims till the funeral's over?"

"Of course," replied Solomon; "but there will be the inquest first, you know. I wish it was all over. It has made me feel quite ill."

"I'm sure I don't wonder at that. I will leave you now, and go and get a black rig on. I suppose I shall meet you at the inquest, sir?" said Joe.

"Yes, I shall be there," replied Solomon wearily; and Joe left the room.

The inquest was held before the Assistant Magistrate later in the evening; for, in the hot climate of Griqualand West, it is absolutely necessary that sepulture shall follow as closely on the heels of death as possible. A verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown was returned; and the court adjourned till such date as the cart-driver should be sufficiently recovered to be able to undergo examination.

The funeral took place the next morning at eleven o'clock, the remains being followed to the grave by some five thousand people. Cormack, Solomon, and Hayes returned to Currey Street together after the

burial, and held a long and solemn conclave. Hayes at once stated that he intended to return to England by the next steamer; and Cormack said he thought it was his duty to accompany him for the purpose of seeing Mr. Monkton, and giving him full particulars of the terrible end of his ward.

"But, the question is, can you manage to do without assistance, Solomon? I know of course that as a man of business I can't hold a candle either to poor Dick or yourself; but now that he is gone you will find the work too much for you, and I can help you a little in many ways," said the Captain.

"As far as the work goes, Captain," answered Solomon, "I can get on very well by myself. And I was thinking, as I lay awake last night, that this horrible affair must necessarily alter all our plans," and he glanced towards Hayes, who, having said his say, was sitting with his heels on the table and his chair tilted backwards, paying no attention to the conversation. "I concluded that you would wish to take a trip home; and I must say that, after this shocking event, I feel as if I required a change myself. However, it is absurd for me to talk of going home for the next month or two at any rate. What I propose is this. Poor Bunton left a will, as no doubt you are aware, by which his estate is divided equally between us, as he had no relatives living, or at any rate knew of none. Let us sell out, divide the proceeds, and then we shall be free to invest in whatever speculations we may fancy. You need not remain here an hour longer than you choose. I will close up both the diamond buying and

mining concerns, sell to the best advantage, and remit to you in London; and come home myself as soon as ever I can get away."

"Well, my dear boy, I'll think it over," said Cormack.

Solomon went down to the office in the course of the afternoon; went carefully through the books, and struck a rough trial balance. The books, of course, only contained the record of legitimate transactions, and although the business showed a profit, it was only a trifle compared to the result of unrecorded dealings.

"Not much difficulty in closing this shop," said Solomon to himself, "and I don't suppose any one would be fool enough to give us more than a hundred or two for the fixtures and goodwill," and he laughed.

He went through the few parcels of diamonds in the safe, weighed them up, and ran out the values carefully again; and then closed the office and took a cab to de Beer's. Here he found Joe sitting in the engine-house, smoking his solitary pipe, and looking very miserable. The machinery was standing idle, and the only signs of life about the works were a couple of niggers who were engaged in staying up a jumper that had given way.

"Well, Joe," said Solomon, stepping into the engine-house, and taking a seat on one of the cylinders, "this affair has upset all our plans, and is likely, I am afraid, to lead to the breaking up of our interests here. The Captain has set his mind upon selling out and going home; and, between ourselves, although he is an excellent sleeping partner, he could be of no assistance to me if he remained here. There will be no difficulty

whatever about closing the diamond business, and I think we ought to knock something handsome out of the claims and gear here. What's your opinion?"

"Well, sir," replied Joe, thoughtfully, rubbing his forehead, "if I was you, I don't think I should feel inclined to sell the ground. I hear a lot of talk about companies in Kimberley, and the enormous profit claim-holders are making by putting their ground in, as they call it. Well, why shouldn't you start a company in de Beer's?"

"Yes, I've thought of that," replied Solomon, "but it will be necessary to have a sale for all that; because I shall have to pay Captain Cormack out, do you understand?"

"Oh, I see," said Joe, "with a knowing twinkle in his eye; "if you're willing to let me stand in a bit, I can easy manage that job for you, Mr. Solomon."

Not to weary my readers unnecessarily with details of transactions of a character then very common on the Fields, it will suffice to say that the claims in de Beer's were put up to auction in the ordinary manner, and bought on the quiet by a friend of Solomon's, at a price which represented less than half of their real market value. The money was paid over at once, and a few hours sufficed to enable the versatile Solomon to prepare what he called a statement, exhibiting the position of affairs as between Cormack, himself, and the deceased doctor. The will of the latter had, of course, to go through the mill of the Master's office, and be properly proved before his share of the property could be legally touched by his surviving partners; but

as they were his executors, and there had never been a deed of partnership, they were safe, if not honest, in anticipating probate.

All Solomon's efforts were now directed to getting Cormack and Hayes away as soon as possible. He loathed the sight of them, recalling, as their presence did, his murdered partner.

"Once I get them out of my sight," he said to himself, "I shall be myself again. After all, I never told that brute Barney to use violence; and it wasn't my fault if Bunton chose to be obstinate."

But somehow that reflection failed to bring him peace; and he hurried Cormack more persistently than ever. Another thing that troubled him continually was the fear lest Piet, the cart-driver, when he came out of hospital, might throw sufficient light on the circumstances surrounding the murder to criminate Barney and his accomplices. The man had been in their service for a long time, and Solomon, feigning interest in his welfare, visited him daily in the ward in which he lay. The blow on the head had induced a sharp attack of congestion of the brain, and the man's life was in serious jeopardy for many days after his admission to the Carnarvon Hospital. But the careful nursing of the sisters, whose tender ministering has rescued so many hundred lives in that noble institution, was slowly, but surely pulling him round, and his complete recovery had become a matter of almost absolute certainty.

As the date of his convalescence approached nearer and nearer, so the apprehensions of the crafty Solomon increased, until he became a victim to a sort of morbid

horror, which seemed completely to distort his mental faculties. His face grew pale, emaciated, and drawn downwards from the eyes; his skin assumed a ghastly ashen hue; and he found it impossible to sit still or remain in the same position for more than a few minutes together. He began to be sensible of a marked and growing impediment in his speech; and his limbs, and more especially his hands, contracted a nervous twitching, which he was powerless to check, although perfectly aware when it was about to occur. He slept badly; and when he did manage to doze for an hour or so, his dreams were so horrible that the bare recollection of them next day gave him that distressing sensation of vacuum in the stomach which generally precedes a fainting fit.

Miserable in the company of others, he was ten times more wretched when left to himself. He kept a bright light burning all night in his bedroom; for darkness unnerved him to such a degree that he felt he could not have remained in an unlighted room for five minutes without screaming. And yet the light was a torture to him; for it had a ghastly habit of turning blood-red, and metamorphosing the innocent furniture on which its rays fell into hideous shapes of mutilated men, whose wounds gaped and shed their gory flood into the sea of blood which, in his disordered vision, replaced the sombre-hued carpet in the middle of the room.

It was not conscience which induced these, to Solomon, particularly disagreeable phenomena. He had certainly heard people talk of conscience, and had a

vague kind of notion as to the abstract signification of the term ; but he would have laughed to scorn the bare idea of his being incommoded by the possession of any such ridiculous attribute, as he would have considered it. No ; it was funk, pure and simple.

At last everything in connection with the partnership was cleared up ; and Solomon, who, of course, acted as liquidator of the concern, handed Cormack, who was too much cut-up to be suspicious, a cheque for something over ten thousand pounds, as his share in the estate. Hayes gave Solomon a draft upon his father for the considerable amount in which he was—or was supposed to be—indebted to our hero ; and nothing remained but to pack up and say good-bye to friends, most of whom they were never likely to meet again.

The Blowsers had arranged to travel down to Cradock, to which town the railway had been recently extended, by the same coach ; and Solomon began to congratulate himself upon getting them all off his hands so easily. But the driver was rapidly improving, and would be out of hospital, and able to give his evidence in a few days ; and Solomon fairly shivered when he thought to what his revelations might possibly lead.

One morning, two or three days before Cormack and the Blowsers were to leave Kimberley, Solomon strolled down to the Hospital to see the driver, and found him so much better that the doctor said he would be able to leave in a couple of days. Solomon went home and put on his considering cap. He had had several conversations with the sick man since his convalescence, and was convinced, from sundry expressions he had let

fall, that he had some inkling of the robbers' identity, which, when his memory was aided by the questions and suggestions of his lawyers, might very likely develop into certainty. Solomon felt that his evidence must be suppressed at all hazards. But how? It would be extremely dangerous to attempt to tamper with him by means of a bribe; indeed, the poor fellow was so loyal to his late master that the success of any such attempt was more than doubtful. Whatever was done must be done at once; because, once the driver left the hospital, the authorities would lose no time in taking his evidence. Besides this, he was easier to get at in the hospital than elsewhere.

Solomon sat and discussed the matter with himself for some time, without hitting upon any satisfactory means of dealing with it.

At length, however, he rose with a brighter look on his face, and, after making a careful toilet, walked over and called upon the Blowzers. Only the young lady was at home. Solomon made himself particularly agreeable, and took quite a load off poor Fanny's heart; for his recent behaviour to her had, not unnaturally, led her to fear that she was losing her place in his affections. After a few minutes, Solomon artfully led the conversation to the subject of the driver:—"I expect he'll be out and about again in a day or two; he was sitting up the last time I saw him, looking almost himself. I'm going down to see him again presently to take him some fruit," said he.

"Oh, then you can take him some of the grapes we got from Graaff Reinets this morning. They are much

finer than those I sent him last week ; see !” and she pointed to a large basket of magnificent Nakuepoot grapes on the sideboard.

“By Jove, those are beauties, indeed !” said Solomon, taking up a huge bunch from the basket and eyeing it admiringly. “Piet ought to be very grateful to you for all the nice things you have sent him during his illness.”

“Nonsense ; I’m sure the poor fellow is very welcome to the little odds and ends we have been able to find for him,” replied Miss Fanny ; allowing her fine eyes to rest upon those of Solomon for several seconds with an expression not easy to misinterpret.

“When are you going down to the hospital ?” she asked presently.

“I was thinking of taking a cab down at once,” he answered.

“Do you think they would let me see him if I went with you ?”

“Of course. There could be no possible objection.”

“Well, then, I will come on one condition : that we walk. It would set everybody talking if we were seen riding about in a cart.”

“I should much prefer the walk, since I shall enjoy more of your charming companionship so than if we were to cab it,” replied Solomon, whose compliments were gradually getting the angles knocked off them.

He rose and opened the door for the young lady, who promised to return, equipped for the walk, in a few minutes.

As soon as he had closed the door, Solomon walked

quickly to the sideboard, took up the basket of grapes, and selecting a particularly ripe bunch, pulled off about half-a-dozen of the largest grapes.

These he carried over to the open window and pricked, holding them with unsteady fingers and standing a little in the shadow of the curtain, with some bright instrument which he took from his pocket. Then he appeared to insert a few grains of some white substance taken from a tiny dark-blue bottle, into the incisions in the grapes.

While he was doing this he happened to cast his eyes into the street, and noticed that he was apparently being watched by two shabby-looking men standing under the verandah of the shop opposite. This discovery completely upset him, and he jumped back from the window and let the grape he was manipulating fall into the street. One of the men laughed in a jeering manner, and walked over and picked up the grape with evident signs of disgust.

He carried it across to his friend, who remarked with a strong Jewish twang, "May I take a mesa if I didn't think it was gouivas he was piping!"

"Why, swelp me never, so did I too! and it was only a bloomin' grape. Well, I'll eat it anyhow."

'No, you don't," said the other, snatching at it and knocking it into the gutter; whereat they both laughed noisily.

Solomon had watched the two from behind the curtain, and caught enough of the dialogue to understand its general drift. It was wonderful what a sense of relief he experienced when he saw that grape roll

into the filth between the roadway and the sidewalk. Presently, the fair Fanny rejoined him, resplendent in her wealth of sultry-looking hair, and the extreme limit of the last Port Elizabeth fashion.

The walk towards the hospital was hot, long, dusty, and unpleasant. Not far from the end of their journey, they descried Heath driving a very big horse, in a skeleton trap with enormous wheels, which he had lately imported from the States; and which all his friends agreed would be the ultimate means of his breaking his neck. The road was full of ruts and stones, and the pace at which Heath was travelling made the huge wheels of his buggy jump high off the track every time they struck an obstruction. The ungainly brute of a horse was pulling like a steam-tug, and his driver had all he could do to hold him with both hands.

Seeing Miss Blowser and her companion approaching, Heath, who had latterly evinced unmistakable signs of attraction for the lady's face, or her fortune—his own was looking none too rosy—made frantic endeavours to pull his horse up, so as to enable him to salute with some degree of decorum. He succeeded in reducing the speed considerably; and, as he arrived abreast of the two pedestrians, he changed the reins into his left hand and had just raised his hat with his right, when the horse, missing the pull on his mouth, reared straight up, gave a furious kick as he came down, sending Heath and a small Hottentot who served as his groom flying out of the buggy, and bolted towards Kimberley at a pace which meant total destruction to the frail vehicle behind him in the course of a few minutes.

The whole thing happened so suddenly, and the rapid motion of the cart raised such a cloud of dust, that it was not till several seconds after the accident that Solomon saw that Heath had been dragged some fifty yards by the runaway, and was lying apparently lifeless, in the roadway. Miss Blowser was leaning against a garden fence, with her hands before her face, trembling with fright. There were but few people about, and none except the groom and Heath within some hundreds of yards of them. The groom had risen from the road, and was limping, with his hand on his right hip, slowly and painfully towards where his master was lying. Solomon put his hand into his waistcoat-pocket, and carefully extracted five grapes, which he placed amongst those he had been carrying in a nonsensical little ornamental straw basket for Miss Blowser.

Then he said, "Come, come, there's nothing to be frightened about. Heath isn't hurt a bit. I am going to look after him. But what shall we do about poor Piets' grapes? Will you leave them at the hospital for him while I go and attend to Heath?"

"Oh yes, yes, give them to me, quick! and make haste and have that poor man looked after; I'm sure he's badly hurt."

Fanny took the basket, and continued her walk towards the hospital; and Solomon, with a curious mixture of terror and exultation in his heart, made the best of his way towards his former fellow-voyager. Heath was lying on his back, his eyes fixed and staring, his lips blue, and the rest of his face a ghastly ashen grey. His eyes did not move when Solomon bent over

him, nor did his lips even quiver. He was insensible, and Solomon at first feared that the prophecy with regard to the broken neck had been fulfilled. Several persons had by this time congregated round the injured man, and the groom, whose hip was badly hurt, had given them an account of the disaster.

Solomon, fearing some severe injury, was unwilling to allow those who offered to carry Heath to the hospital, and despatched a messenger for a proper stretcher.

Before it arrived, one of the Kimberley medicos happened to drive along, and at once alighted and said he would wait and see Heath safely settled in the hospital. Thanks to the doctor's instructions, the transport was safely and expeditiously effected; and a few minutes' examination enabled the attendant physicians to inform Solomon that his friend was suffering from concussion of the brain and injury to the spine, and that his case was a very serious one indeed—so serious in fact that it was exceedingly doubtful whether he would ever recover consciousness. Solomon could do no good by remaining with Heath; and the superintendent having promised to send a special messenger for him on the slightest change in the patient's condition, he left the room and made his way towards the wing of the building in which the ward where he had last seen the driver Piet was situated.

Meeting one of the attendants, to most of whom his frequent visits to Piet had made his features familiar, he asked to see him.

"Oh, you'll find him sitting outside on the stoep,"

the nurse replied, "he seems brighter than ever to-day ; in fact he talks of leaving us for good to-morrow."

Solomon thanked her, and went round to the front of the building, where he soon found Piet, reclining luxuriously in a bamboo chair, and Fanny chatting to him most graciously.

A woman never appears to better advantage in the eyes of the other sex, no matter how *blasé* and world-battered the proprietor of the said eyes may chance to be, than when she is ministering in that gentle, pitying manner which is common to good women—and credulous persons affirm to angels—to the wants of her frailer or less fortunate brothers and sisters. Fanny, doing her best to entertain this untutored, drink-debased fellow, whose mixed breed had cursed him with most of the savage and all the European vices of his forefathers, and whose one solitary virtue consisted in being faithful to his employer—until some one else offered him higher wages—Fanny, as she sat beside him, talking down to his level of intelligence, trying to discover if there were anything lacking for his comfort which it might be in her power to supply, struck Solomon, as he approached unseen, as being infinitely sweeter, infinitely more *spirituelle* in expression, more tender, more womanly, than he had ever thought her before.

She seemed to dawn upon him in fact as a new revelation. If he had ever examined his impression of her character in the past he would have set her down as a hoyden, a madcap, who cared for little beyond frolic, mischief, and flirtation. But here he saw her in a totally new light, and something told him this was her very self.

She rose as soon as she perceived him, and meeting him asked in a whisper after Heath. She feared lest Piet should suffer a relapse if he were informed of the disaster, he being rather a favourite with Heath, whom he had often driven before the ill-fated trotting cart was purchased. Solomon told her that the doctors could say nothing definite until the patient regained consciousness, but that they did not anticipate any serious consequences at present—which was wonderfully near the truth for Solomon. They then walked along to where Piet was lying, and Solomon asked him how he felt.

“Oh, much better, master, much better. I got a sort of queer woolly feeling here in my head, sometimes, where that schelm cracked it; but I shall be all right when I get away from here. I wants to get on the track of them dam rascals; that’s what’s made me so long getting well, master.”

“Ah yes, but do you think you’d be able to recognize any of them?” asked Solomon, with a desperate and not too successful attempt at nonchalance.

“Well, master, I thinks I could swear to one of them. A ugly, round-faced kerl, with big, fat lips, and a turn-up nose like a Hottentot. I seen him somewheres in camp afore that night at the Nek, but I can’t think where it was. Somehow I fancies, though of course it’s ridiculous, that I seen him along of master one night up in Newton.”

“With me!” said Solomon, shifting his eyes uneasily from Piet’s face to the ground; “well, that is an extraordinary idea, certainly. But I forget; you have been

cliff your head so long that it is not strange you should have got hold of some odd fancies."

"Yes, master," acquiesced Piet, dutifully; and the subject dropped.

A plate containing grapes stood on a little iron garden-table at Piet's left hand; but, although he eyed them wistfully now and then, he had refrained from touching them in the presence of Miss Blowser. Presently she and Solomon took leave of him with many expressions of goodwill; and finding a cab outside the gates, defied decorum on a plea of expediency, and were speedily deposited in Kimberley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OPEN VERDICT

THE Captain and Hayes were both much shocked when Solomon informed them of Heath's disaster, and both intimated their intention of accompanying him in his visit to the hospital on the following morning. Dinner that evening was one of the gloomiest meals the three had ever partaken of; and a climax to the dismal feelings of the trio arrived in the shape of a message, requiring Solomon's instant attendance at the hospital, just as the cloth was being removed from the table. The messenger had come up in a cab, so that there was no need for delay. Solomon jumped up, ran into his bedroom, and emerged again after an absence of a few minutes, with a face so ghastly pale that Cormack, who had determined to go with him, and was ready to start, insisted on his swallowing a stiff glass of brandy-and-water before leaving. Then his hat was not to be found, and after wasting some precious minutes in hunting for it in all sorts of impossible places, Solomon was persuaded by Cormack to take one of Hayes's.

At length they got away, and a rough drive of some seven or eight minutes brought them to the hospital. Entering, Cormack, who was in front, asked at once to

be shown into the ward occupied by Heath. The nurse, to whom he had preferred his request, went to fetch the superintendent, who soon answered the summons.

"It was not to see Mr. Heath, gentlemen, that I sent a message to Mr. Davis. His driver Piet was taken suddenly and most unaccountably ill about half-an-hour ago, and as in his agony he kept begging to see Mr. Davis, I sent a messenger. But you are too late; the poor fellow is dead."

"Good God, how shocking!" ejaculated Solomon and Cormack, almost in the same breath. "Why, when Miss Blowser and I left him this evening he was as cheerful as possible, and talked of leaving the hospital and coming back to his work again in a day or two," said Solomon.

"It must have been a very sudden relapse, surely, doctor?" asked Cormack.

"So sudden and unexpected that we are utterly at a loss to account for it," replied the medical man. "The symptoms also are utterly unaccountable, at least till the *post-mortem* has been held."

Solomon kept in the background after his first remark. His face would have been an interesting study if the doctor could have seen through Cormack's shoulders when he mentioned the autopsy.

Presently the superintendent said, "Well, gentlemen, you must excuse me, for I have my hands full in the accident ward. Oh, by the way, your friend, Mr. Heath"—speaking to Solomon—"although he has not spoken, is evidently easier, and I think I shall be able to report hopefully of him to-morrow. Good night, gentlemen; I

am sorry to have been the means of dragging you all this way for nothing."

"Not at all, my dear sir, not at all," said the Captain, "I'm quite cut up about the poor fellow—so fond as he was of my poor friend Bunton too. I should like to say, doctor, that we will bear all the expenses of a respectable funeral—Mr. Davis and I, I mean. Good-night, and thank you very much; we shall call and inquire about Mr. Heath to-morrow."

As they got into the cab at the gate, Cormack said, "I tell you what it is, Solomon; I'm not religious, and I don't know that I am more of a coward than most men; but it seems to me that we're under a ban. First, Dick and young Caldecott; now, this poor devil Piet, who never had an enemy but himself; to-morrow, Heath, as like as not, who, though I don't exactly admire him, has his good points; the day after, you or me—who knows? No, sir, by the living God, it's not good enough to stay in such a country; and, once I'm well out of it, the whole of Her Majesty's fleet won't haul me back. Curse the country, say I!"

"It certainly has brought us little beyond the pieces," said Solomon wearily.

"D—n the dirty money. Can you think of nothing but piling up your miserable hoard by means of roguery that would insure your being lynched in any decently conducted mining camp in any country but this hell's sink of a South Africa? Have you no feelings, man?"

"I'm too tired and too seedy to-night to be able to tell you, Captain; I'm miserable enough, if that is what

you want to know," replied Solomon, almost in a whisper.

"Forgive me, my dear boy," said the impulsive, warm-hearted Cormack, "I'm a perfect brute to talk in that strain; but I'm so angry with myself, and irritable, and wretched, that I hardly know what I am saying."

"Never mind, Captain, I know you didn't mean it," sighed Solomon.

Neither of them felt much inclined for sleep when they got back to Currey Street, and they sat smoking and drinking a great deal more whiskey-and-water than was good for them, and occasionally exchanging a few short sentences, far into the small hours; in fact the dawn was breaking as Cormack and Solomon sought their bed-rooms.

It was close on noon of the following day when they entered Heath's room at the hospital. The windows were darkened so that they could barely discern his features; but they saw that he moved his eyes, though it was evident he did not recognize them. The doctors reported favourably, so far; but said that the fast living in which Heath had for so long indulged had undermined his constitution to an extent which considerably increased the gravity of his present condition. And that was all they could or would say on the subject. Cormack and Solomon were only permitted to look at him for a minute or so, and on leaving the room the superintendent took them into his private *sanctum*.

"The *post-mortem* on your coachman was held this morning," said he to Solomon, as soon as they were seated, "and with a most extraordinary result. The

doctors who performed it are unanimously of opinion that he—was—poisoned,” the last three words being spoken very deliberately and impressively.

“Poisoned!” cried Solomon, throwing up his hands in horror. “How could he possibly have been poisoned? In the hospital too!”

“Was there a mistake made in his medicine, perhaps, doctor? I have heard of such things happening in hospitals at home?” queried Cormack.

“I have known rare instances of that myself,” replied the doctor, “but that explanation will not satisfy the present case. The man has taken no medicine whatever for the last four days. Besides, the poison employed is never prescribed in its crude state, which was that in which the unfortunate man swallowed it.”

“Then you have discovered the nature of the poison?” asked Cormack.

“Oh yes; there was little doubt from the symptoms that it was strychnine, and the examination of the stomach confirmed it beyond the possibility of a doubt.”

“Good God, how horrible!” exclaimed Cormack.

And Solomon stammered, “Shocking.”

“The inquest is to be held before the magistrate this afternoon at three; and I think, Mr. Davis, as you were with the man so shortly before he was taken ill, that it will be as well if you will be present. The young lady who was with him before you came is also likely to be required as a witness,” said the doctor; “in fact I understand subpœnas have been issued for both.”

“It will be most unpleasant for Miss Blowser to have to appear in open court,” objected Solomon;

"could not some other arrangement be made as to her evidence?"

"I hardly think so," replied the doctor; "you see this is a most mysterious case, and every tittle of evidence is of the greatest importance."

"In that case I had better call and prepare the young lady for what she has to go through," said Solomon. "I doubt if she has even heard yet that the man is dead."

Cormack and Solomon then took leave, after making arrangements for the funeral, and the latter called upon Fanny, who was terribly upset by the news of the shocking death of the unfortunate Piet. She declared her readiness to attend the inquest, but doubted whether her doing so would be of any assistance in solving the mystery. Solomon promised to call and escort her and her father down to the magistrate's office; and telling her to keep up her courage, as the inquest was merely a matter of form, bid her an almost lover-like adieu, and betook himself to Currey Street, where Cormack and Hayes were waiting tiffin for him.

Inquests, except in certain very rare instances, have never been popular as entertainments in Kimberley; and when our party entered the disreputable, evil-smelling kennel that in those days served as the magistrate's court-room, there were only three or four idlers present besides the officials of the court, the district surgeon, and the medical men who had performed the *post-mortem* examination. Miss Blowser was accommodated with the ruins of a chair, and her father, Solomon, and Cormack found themselves seats on the dilapidated benches, pending the arrival of the presiding

genius, and the opening of proceedings. Hayes stood looking out into the street, at the door, with his hands in his pockets, and an illicit cigarette in his mouth.

Presently every one in court rose as the magistrate entered and took his seat behind an ancient and shabby desk, that resembled nothing so much as an inverted beer-cask mounted on four *razé'd* broomsticks for legs. The dread exponent of the law bowed—that is to say he ducked his head as if some one had tapped him smartly on the nape of the neck—and the clerk, or whatever he was, proceeded to recite a curious legend in an unknown tongue and a monotonous tone of voice that speedily sent the Bench and best part of the other officials to sleep. When he got through with this performance, he went up and poked the somnolent magistrate gently in the ribs; eliciting a remark to the effect that spades were trumps, bedad, whatever the spalpeen on his right liked to say about it. Being recalled to a consciousness of the immediate surroundings, however, he condescended to hear the affidavits of the doctors on the *post-mortem*, the history of the patient while in hospital from the superintendent, and other matters appertaining to the case in hand. Fanny was then put into the witness-box, and the occupant of the Bench politely requested her to tell them anything she knew regarding the matter under inquiry, “though”—he added in a whisper to his clerk—“what on earth that iligant foine leddie can possibly know about the boy is more than I can devoine for the life o’ me.”

Fanny, with less of embarrassment than her friends had anticipated, told her story simply and straightforwardly.

She had walked down to the hospital, escorted by Mr. Davis, to take some grapes to the invalid ; but the accident to Mr. Heath had obliged her companion to leave her to attend to his friend ; and she had continued her walk alone, remaining with the driver until Mr. Davis came to take her home. Piet had appeared bright and hopeful, and spoke of leaving the hospital in the course of a few days ; in fact, so far as she was able to judge, there appeared to be nothing more the matter with him than the weakness consequent on a severe illness and long confinement. The magistrate thanked and was about to dismiss her, when one of the medical men rose and asked leave to put a question.

This being granted, he asked, "The grapes which you took to the deceased, did you obtain them from Kimberley?"

"No ; they were part of a large parcel which my father received from Graaf Reinet by coach yesterday morning. We have a quantity of them still."

"Did the deceased eat any of the grapes while you were sitting with him?"

"No ; at least I cannot say quite certainly, but I do not think so. I know the plate containing grapes was standing on the table by his side when Mr. Davis and I took leave of him."

The doctor sat down, and he and his next-door neighbour held a whispered consultation which did not appear to end satisfactorily to either. Miss Fanny was courteously escorted to her seat by the clerk, and Solomon invited to succeed her in the witness-box.

Cormack was painfully struck by the death-like hue

and ghastly expression of Solomon's face as he took the Bible in hand and kissed it—he was no longer an orthodox Jew, and it was all one to him whether he were sworn on a Bible or a brickbat—in response to the mumbled formula of the clerk. Even old Mr. Blowser, usually one of the least observant of mortals, remarked to the Captain, “By Jove, ’ow wretchedly pale that poor boy is a-lookin’. Hi should hinsist hon a course of good fruity port, a change of hair, and a more ’ealthy life ginerally, if I was you, Capting.”

“Ay, he does look a bit seedy ; and no wonder ! We’ve had trouble enough lately to knock up stronger men than he is. I wish we’d never clapt eyes on the accursed country.”

Solomon's story is a repetition of Fanny's, told in a low nervous voice ; but fluently, and without any symptoms of hesitancy. The clerk asked him a few questions, which, however, elicited nothing material to the manner of Piet's death. Then one of the doctors took him in hand. He remembered noticing the grapes on the table by the side of the deceased man ; could not say positively whether Piet ate any of the fruit while he was there, but thought not. Had carried the basket of grapes for Miss Blowser until he had to leave her to attend to 'Heath. Impossible that any one could have tampered with them while in his possession. The magistrate here interrupted, with a commonly foolish exhibition of would-be acuteness, in the shape of a demand whether the examining doctor was of opinion that the grapes had been employed as the vehicle for poison. Medicus glared savagely at the vacuous fatuity on the Bench,

but declined at present to formulate any opinion whatsoever.

Solomon was dismissed, and one or two more witnesses, who knew absolutely nothing of the matter in hand, and who, apparently for that very reason, were examined at the most exhaustive length by the presiding deity of the court, appeared and disappeared from the witness-box. And then the Court made a great to-do, trying to decipher his own mostly illegible notes, filling up the blanks by drawing on his own imagination or the memory of his clerk, which, luckily for the public, was a fairly reliable one for a Civil servant. Having sorted out and deposited the materials for a succession of paper-chases on the top of his desk, the Court blew his nose in an impressive and dignified manner with a red cotton pocket-handkerchief the size of a small tablecloth and delivered his verdict as follows. "That the deceased met his death by poison while an inmate of the Carnarvon Hospital, but whether administered accidentally or otherwise, by himself, or by some other evil-disposed person, there was no evidence to enable the court to determine."

After the enunciation of which miraculous specimen of judicial wisdom, the court adjourned, and everybody went home.

CHAPTER XIX.

WATCHED

THE period which elapsed between the inquest and the departure of Cormack, Hayes, and Mr. and Miss Blowser for the Colony, was one of almost luxurious peace of mind to Solomon, upon whom the constant worry and dread of the last few weeks had begun to tell severely. He remained at home all the morning watching the preparations of Cormack and Hayes, but taking no active part in them. In the afternoon he called upon the Blowsters, taking tea alone with Fanny, and leading the conversation on to such delicate ground that she felt sure he was coming to the point at last. Somehow, however, he invariably refused at the last hurdle; and when the day of their departure at length arrived, all that had been elicited from him was a promise to spend a week with them at Port Elizabeth, when he passed through on his way to England, whither he said he should follow his late partner as soon as he could get away from the Fields.

The parting between Solomon and his four friends was a sad one—for even Solomon could not help thinking of that other parting which had ended so shockingly—and as he walked back alone from the coach-depôt to

the house in Currey Street, his thoughts were not such as most men would have envied him. Arrived there, he locked himself into his bedroom, and after taking the usual precautions to prevent his being watched, he raised the board that covered his ill-gotten hoard, and emptied the contents of the leather pouch on to his bed. These consisted of quite a large number of little paper parcels, each carefully folded and marked with figures and letters, and besides these there were the wash-leather packets taken from the dead body of Dr. Bunton.

Solomon took pencil and paper, and making a note of the weight and description of the contents of each parcel, was for some minutes absorbed in calculation. Presently he put the paper down.

"Sixty-seven thousand carats," he said, half aloud. "Worth over a hundred thousand at the very lowest estimate. Ah, who wouldn't be an I. D. B.? But, the other thing? Oh, damn the other thing! It'll never be found out now."

Then he put the parcels back into the pouch, and the pouch under the floor, replacing the board and grinning in a diabolically satisfied manner.

"Now about the claims," he said to himself; "I must get to work and form the company at once. There's no time to lose."

Later on in the day Solomon went down to de Beer's and held a long consultation with Joe, who was still working the claims, and had everything connected with the gear thoroughly ship-shape, and appeared as usual to be getting through a vast deal of work. One company had already been successfully formed in de

Beer's, and the formation of several others was commonly spoken of. It was at length arranged that Solomon should bring down a party of his friends the next day to inspect the claims and gear, and go over the books, with the object of inducing certain of them to accept office as provisional directors of the new company ; and Joe was instructed to get a nice little champagne lunch prepared for these visitors in his office.

The best part of that night Solomon sat up figuring away on many sheets of paper, making notes and extracts from the books, which were supposed to represent the diamond mining business of himself and his late partners ; and I am afraid, if the truth must be spoken, making no inconsiderable number of totally unjustifiable alterations, erasures, and additions in those books themselves. The said books, like those of many private diggers at that time, were so badly kept, that manipulating them was a matter of no difficulty to a clever unscrupulous person like Mr. Solomon Davis.

Nine next morning saw Solomon in the private office of a well-known Kimberley attorney, getting a rough draft of a prospectus made from his notes of the previous evening. It did not take long to draw up a prospectus in those days, and Solomon left with the document in his pocket before ten o'clock ; the lawyer having benefited to the extent of fifty guineas by the transaction. By eleven, Solomon and eight or nine friends, diamond-dealers like himself—and most of them as unscrupulous, though not so bold and cunning, and therefore not so fortunate as he had been—arrived at the claims, and were shown around by Joe, who had everything in

splendid order in honour of their coming. An adjournment to the office took place shortly before one, and great execution was done upon the champagne and solid delicacies which Joe had managed to provide. After lunch, Solomon read over the draft prospectus to his guests, and substantiated its remarkable statements by frequent reference to the books, which he had brought down from Kimberley, where they were usually kept, for this purpose.

The amount asked by the vendor for eight claims, hauling and washing gear, depositing floors, wells, and carts, horses, and other mining plant and accessories, was the modest sum of £75,000, sterling, in 750 shares of £100 each, of which he obligingly offered to take 100 in part payment, the balance to be in cash. A further sum of £10,000 in £100 shares was also set down as working capital; so that £85,000 was the respectable total of the share and working capital the Success Diamond Mining Company, Limited, of Old de Beer's, were coming to the public for.

After some discussion, more champagne, and a little mild hilarity at Solomon's modest demand, five of the gentlemen present expressed their willingness to become provisional directors, on terms which they no doubt expected to be mutually satisfactory to themselves and Solomon—and possibly also to the shareholders. And it was finally arranged to issue the prospectus as soon as it could be printed; to make Solomon's office that of the company for a few days, and to appoint Joe manager *pro tem*. After which very satisfactory morning's work, Solomon and his friends drove back to Kimberley.

Next day the Success Company was one of the leading topics of conversation in camp; for Solomon, and those of his friends who were in the swim, of course made it their business to advertise the new venture as widely as possible; and the general opinion was, that the Success was a good thing, shares in which would rapidly rise to a nice premium. Whether they would remain there long enough to enable outsiders to sell out was a question for the general public; the promoters and their friends did not trouble their heads about it. The prospectus came out at last, and the eventful morning dawned which was to decide the fate of the company; not that there had been much fear of it, however, from the first. The office was opened at nine o'clock by the secretary, a young man of considerable discretion, great skill with the cards, and, generally speaking, somewhat shady reputation; and the directors, who had been inside for the last half-hour, were agreeably surprised to see that the whole street was absolutely blocked by a surging throng of eager, gesticulating men. There was a general shout as the door opened, and a tremendous rush forward on the part of the crowd at once filled the little office tighter than it had ever been filled before. Business could not possibly be done at such close quarters, and in such a jam as this; and one of the directors at length managed to make the crowd understand that they were not ready to receive applications, but would open the window for that purpose in an hour's time. Whereupon ensued a great deal of grumbling and not a little swearing on the part of those who had secured the best places near the office.

Ten o'clock came, and with it the opening of Solomon Davis's window.

How the checks, bank-notes, promissory notes (not acceptable any of these), and money in envelopes, did pour in, to be sure! It was like an indoor snowstorm, or the General Post Office with a bad leak. The pile of envelopes before the directors grew higher and higher, and still the secretary at the window was being pelted with missives by the crowd without, till his back ached that he could stoop no more to pick them up. Twenty minutes after the opening of the window the secretary was ordered to close it by the chairman; a duty which he performed with great difficulty, and amidst a perfect storm of abuse from without. Having closed the shutters as an extra precaution, the secretary went round to the directors behind the partition previously referred to, and assisted them in making out a list of the applicants for shares, and the number asked for by each. This took considerable time, as many of the would-be shareholders were persons of little or no education, whose handwriting was as odd as their grammar was erratic.

The work, however, was got through at last; and the chairman, a venerable-looking personage, whose character strangely belied his appearance, made the pleasing announcement that, in place of the £85,000 capital they had asked for, the public had generously offered them no less a sum than nearly a quarter of a million. The statement was received with great glee by all but one gloomy-looking old son of the wilderness, who said: "Vad a pidy; if ve'd arsted two 'underd thousand, ve'd a got it.

S'welp me, Solomon, vhy did you vant to go to work in such a beitzmer hurry?"

At which remark the others jeered him unmercifully, and Solomon told him to take a "mesa mershina," or something of that kind, which appeared to annoy him considerably.

And so the Success Company was formed; and Solomon Davis went to bed that night a rich man in actual hard cash, besides being the possessor of diamonds to the value of more than as much again. For the first few days after the formation of the company no movement of any importance took place in its shares. Presently, however, reports of extraordinary finds began to be bruited about. Then it became known that Davis and one or two more of the wealthier directors were purchasing large parcels of shares; and by the end of the first month fully paid up Success shares had advanced to £125, those on which the second call remained unpaid—most shareholders had paid in full—being proportionately high. Some wiseacres prophesied a sharp fall after such a rapid rise; but instead of falling the shares continued rising steadily, and with very good reason too, for three months from the commencement of the company's digging operations, the directors declared a dividend of 10 *per cent.* Some very incredulous persons were even wrong-headed enough to sneer at this, and declare that it was paid out of capital; but it sent the shares up with a spring to £295, where they stopped: for a time.

Solomon was engaged in floating another company when the Success shares reached their climax. He

found that he could manage with more capital than he had free at the time; and, in a few hours, by a little judicious management and playing off one broker against another, he cleared out the whole of his interest in the Success Company at a profit of over three hundred per cent. all round. The next day he resigned his directorship. His colleagues abused him, sold out as much of their scrip as they could place quietly at a profit, and then went on without him as if nothing had happened. Joe left them, however, and it was really curious how the finds fell off under his successors. In fact, the shares soon fell below par; then to almost zero; and the Success Company may here be dismissed with the remark that it never has and never will pay another dividend at the rate of 40 *per cent. per annum*.

Solomon's next company, with a more influential directorate than the Success—for his continual good luck induced many men to follow his fortunes who considered him beneath them socially—was a second edition of that company. The ground was bought at a ridiculously low figure by Solomon and his allies; worked apparently at a large profit, for a time, and then put into a company at a fabulous figure. The shares were forced up, the directors sold out on the quiet; and, when the shareholders tried to realize the Company's assets, they found nothing but dust and ashes; and wailing and gnashing of teeth produced nothing from the hard-hearted directors beyond the remark—"Why the devil didn't you sell out when we did?"

Meanwhile, Solomon had not disposed of the diamond

business, but still took his licence out and kept his office on as usual. He did not appear to be doing much, in fact, he told his friends that he was just keeping the office on more for the sake of meeting the fellows on the diamond market, and to have some place to pass his time besides his house, than for anything else. He went out a great deal more too than had been his habit when Bunton and Cormack were with him. From Friday to Monday he was generally away at Barkly, the Junction, the Bend, or some other neighbouring resort. In fact, he seemed to be thoroughly fidgety and incapable of settling to business or anything else.

Joe was now installed as general factotum at the house in Currey Street, but the place did not agree with him, and he was fretting to be out of it. He had put by enough money to enable him to establish himself in business as a publican in England, and this had been the dream of his life for years past. He had made up his mind to quit the dishonest ways of I. D. B., and was itching to put his good resolution into effect. And yet he could not bring himself to desert Solomon, whom he knew to be still largely implicated in the illicit traffic, and upon whom he had lately begun to fancy the detectives were beginning to look with increased suspicion. So that, altogether, Joe was not by any means happy or contented. Solomon treated him more as an equal than as a dependant, but Joe had an idea that his employer was not nearly so open with him as was the case while Bunton was alive, and he naturally felt hurt at this seeming want of confidence. At length he determined to speak, and one evening,

when he had brought Solomon the materials for their usual nightcap, he opened the subject.

"If you've no objection, Mr. Solomon, I'd like to say a word or two about myself before you goes to bed."

"By all means, Joe. Go ahead! Is anything the matter?" asked Solomon.

"Why no, sir; leastways nothing the matter yet. But I'm afraid them infernal D.'s has got their eyes on our little game; and I don't cotton to the idea of ten years on the Cape Town breakwater, after workin' hard so long, and putting by a decentish bit of money—I mean for a chap like me."

"Oh, you're safe enough, Joe. There's no more chance of your being had the way we are working it now than there is of their catching me," laughed Solomon.

"You must excuse me, sir, but I'm not at all sure those confounded D.'s are not watching you very sharply too. I'm thinkin' you move about too much. I've spotted one or two hang-dog-lookin' blokes a-squintin' round about the house lately when you haven't been here. They're after no good, b'lieve me, sir," said Joe, in a serious manner, which deprecated Solomon's easy treatment of his warning.

"But what can they be after, man? You don't imagine I'm such an idiot as to keep stuff in the house, or even to bring it here, do you?" demanded Solomon, sharply.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know, sir. You know you have brought it here, and kept it here for weeks, a while back."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that; but that was ages ago, long before the——"

"Before the murder, you mean ; I don't wonder you hate to say the word, sir," said Joe.

Solomon looked hard at him as he answered, "Ay, it is not pleasant to think or speak about it."

But Joe meant nothing more than what he said, and Solomon soon dropped his eyes, satisfied that his late manager suspected nothing. The conversation lasted until late, but Joe did not broach his project of going home, as he saw that there was small chance of its being favourably received.

A day or two after this Solomon was having tiffin, when Joe came in and whispered, "There's them two blokes a-piping us off again from the corner ; come and look through the blind, sir, and you can see what you make of them."

Solomon dropped his knife and fork—somewhat in the Petticoat Lane fashion, with a clatter—upset a wine-glass in his haste, and was soon peeping through the blind in the direction indicated by Joe. Two men were walking up and down the street in opposite directions very slowly, as if killing time. The extent of their promenade was irregular ; and so far as those who were watching could see, they neither spoke nor made any sign to each other when they met. In fact, beyond an apparently casual, rapid glance at the different houses in the street, they seemed to be taking very little notice of their surroundings. Presently one of the men stared squarely for a moment across at Solomon's house, and was recognized by him at once. He was the man who had picked up the grape which fell from the window of Miss Blowser's sitting-room. Solomon staggered back

from the Venetian blind as he made this discovery. Joe, luckily for him, was intently watching the other man, and did not notice his master's sudden start.

"Well, Joe, what do you make out of that fellow?" asked Solomon, as soon as he could command his voice. "This one looks to me like a canteen-loafer, or a Methodist parson out of work, more than anything I know of."

"I can't make nothing of that bloke, sir; he does look something like a disabled sky-pilot, certainly. But if this here joker"—and he pointed to the man he had been scrutinizing who had passed the house—"isn't Phangsky, I'll undertake to eat him."

Phangsky was at that time by far the smartest detective on the Fields. He made up almost equally well in male and female characters; was master of quite a number of languages and dialects; was agile as a cat, a good and plucky boxer, and trusted but two men in camp—his chief and himself.

"The devil! What makes you think so?" asked Solomon in an agitated voice, which he strove in vain to control.

"Why, he's got a curious trick of lifting his left shoulder every now and then as he walks," answered Joe. "I've studied him more than any man in Kimberley; I can't tell you how I twig him exactly, sir; but that's him, take my word for it."

Solomon went back to his tiffin, but his appetite had vanished.

What could be the object of this man in watching his house, especially in company of the detective—for he

entertained no doubt that Joe was right as to his identity? He had not thought it possible that either of the men who were in the street when he dropped the grape could have recognized him, because he was standing with his head down, and though they could see his hands easily, his features were almost hidden. Poor Solomon had no rest for the remainder of that day and night, and awoke in the early morning from a feverish doze of but a few minutes' duration, in a state of mind as utterly miserable as the most inveterate of his enemies could have wished him.

CHAPTER XX.

FROM PALACE TO PRISON

THE next four days Solomon spent wretchedly enough at Barkly. He was constantly haunted by the man who had picked up the grape. He ran against him in the streets, saw him alight from the post-cart, fought him in his dreams, and could not get rid of him anyhow. He tried indulging in excessive libations of champagne, and made himself ill; but the man only appeared to become more lavish of his attentions than ever. I think he would have taken his own life, but for a certain vague, cowardly fear of meeting three persons, whom he would prefer to avoid, in some unknown region beyond the grave. On the fifth morning, after a horrible night, of which he would have found difficulty in saying whether the sleeping or waking portion were the most terribly distressing, he made up his mind to return to Kimberley come what might. He telegraphed to Joe, who had everything comfortable for him when he reached home in the evening.

"Well, Joe, anything fresh since I've been away?" he asked, uneasily, as soon as they were indoors.

"Nothing particular, sir. They run in six of the boys" (naming them) "in The Pan, night before last. Only

small fry as usual. What fools some people are, to be sure ! ”

After dinner Solomon having read his letters, which included one from Miss Blowser repeating her father's invitation to him, sent for Joe and told him he had made up his mind to go down to Port Elizabeth for a month, as he felt that he required a change.

“ I'm right glad to hear that, sir,” said Joe, as if he meant it. “ I've noticed you've been lookin' down-in-the-mouth-like lately, and you don't eat enough to keep a sparrow. When do you think of starting, sir ? ”

“ Well, there is nothing of any importance to keep me here. When does the next coach leave ? ”

“ Let's see ! Day after to-morrow, sir,” replied Joe.

“ You may book me a seat by that, then ; and get a portmanteau packed for me. You know what I shall want,” said Solomon.

The next day Solomon went down to his office, wrote some letters, sold the small stock of diamonds he had on hand there ; and left the key with his next door neighbour, saying he meant to have a run down to the coast. Then he went round the Diamond Market bidding adieu to his friends, and distributing a liberal offering of champagne at the various bars *en route*. He had dinner out with some of his more intimate cronies, and a long talk with Joe before going to bed. He rose early next morning, and selecting a strong silk under-vest, carefully stitched into it, on the outside, the little paper and wash-leather parcels which he took from their hiding-place under the floor. Then he put the under-vest on, pulled another thick one over it, and

dressed leisurely and carefully. After breakfast he presented Joe with a crisp new Standard bank-note for £100, which that worthy accepted with many feeling expressions of gratitude, which were increased almost tearfully when Solomon drew a ring from his finger and placed it in Joe's horny palm.

The portmanteau was sent down to the coach-office, and Solomon and his henchman followed. In a few minutes the lumbering machine moved away amidst the waving handkerchiefs and good wishes of the little crowd who had assembled to see their friends off. Solomon felt nervous till they had crossed the border; but that once passed, he sank back in his corner, and in spite of the bumping and rattling of the coach slept as he had not done for many a long month. He slept the best part of the way to Cradock, only waking up for meals, to which he did ample justice. From Cradock until the train rolled into Port Elizabeth he never woke once, and when he reached the Bay he looked and felt like another man.

The early hour at which the train arrived made it impossible for him at once to proceed to the "'ouse on the 'ill," as Mr. Blowser called his residence; and he put up at the 'Phoenix Hotel,' where he indulged in a warm bath and a capital breakfast. About ten o'clock he sallied out and paid his respects to the manager of a certain institution which shall be nameless—Act XLVIII. of 1882 was, of course, not thought of then—and having weighed and insured his diamonds, consigned them to a well-known firm in Hatton Garden, with the customary precautions to insure safe delivery. Leaving the

diamonds with the manager, whose note-of-hand he held for them, he took a cab, and was soon exchanging greetings with Mrs. Blowser and her delighted daughter.

The next few weeks passed very pleasantly for Solomon. He received letters from Cormack and Hayes, forwarded from Kimberley; and Joe also wrote him to say that everything was going on as usual, and that there was no news beyond the running in of a few more of the I. D. B. small fry. Cormack told him that he had invested his capital so as to bring in a snug little income for a confirmed bachelor, and that he had taken a cosy little crib at Hampton Wick, on the Thames, where he hoped to live and die in peace, and where he expected to see him (Solomon) on his return to England. Hayes had not much to say for himself, but he enclosed a cheque from Mr. Monkton, with a request that Solomon would see that a suitable headstone was erected over Caldecott's grave. Solomon winced when he came to this, but he sent the cheque on to Joe, and asked him to see the clergyman who had buried the murdered youth, and get him to do what he might deem proper. It had probably never struck Cormack that a gravestone ought to be erected over Bunton's resting-place; at any rate the poor little doctor would not have rested any the easier for it. Solomon thought of mentioning the matter when he received Hayes's letter; but he refrained, for a variety of reasons.

And so the time spun along, and Solomon's month had run almost into two, and he showed no symptoms of any wish to leave his present exceedingly comfortable quarters. Mr. Blowser had introduced him to

many of his friends, and the tale of his wealth had gone abroad, and been immensely exaggerated, as usual; and Solomon found himself courted and *fêted* as he had never imagined likely, or even possible, in his wildest dreams.

It was all wonderfully pleasant; the drives, picnics, hunting-parties—Solomon was always rather frightened of the guns though—dances, card-parties, and all the rest of the gaiety. And it was none the less pleasant that he so frequently enjoyed the sprightly company of Miss Fanny, to whom he was by all her friends and many of his own considered as engaged. And they were not far wrong either. One morning, after a dance which had lasted later than usual, and at which Solomon's headache told him that either the champagne must have been very bad or that he must have absorbed an abnormal quantity of it, he woke to the consciousness that he had proposed and had been accepted. He sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes hard, but he could not rub away the fact that his *fiancée's* glove was lying on his dressing-table, and that a ring he usually wore was absent from his finger, and presumably where he placed it over night upon hers.

He rose and dressed, feeling very odd and uncommonly seedy.

"Well," he said aloud, as he scented his handkerchief—he had grown to be somewhat of a dandy of late—"if it's done it can't be helped, and I must only make the best of it. But what a fool I am, to be sure, to go and tie myself for life to a red-headed—no, damn it, she isn't so red-headed, and I'm an ungrateful brute. But

it is a rum go. I shall go for a walk and try and find myself."

He walked briskly down White's Road, on to the Jetty, and after a turn or two there, wandered over to the 'Phoenix,' where he took something rather powerful to steady his nerves, which were really feeling very odd. The Blowsers never breakfasted very early, and Solomon dawdled away the time until after nine o'clock, chatting with people whom he knew at the hotel, reading the morning paper, and puffing at cigarettes, not one of which he smoked out. At length he thought it was time to move, and turning into Jetty Street walked as far as the railway-station, and bought a fine bouquet of fresh Uitenhage flowers as an offering to his lady-love.

As he turned away from the boy from whom he had bought the bouquet, a man, dressed in tight-fitting dark blue clothes, who had been standing near, apparently admiring the roses and camellias, came up and said in a low voice, "Your name is Solomon Davis, I think?"

Solomon started and jumped away, but recollecting himself, replied as steadily as he could, "Certainly it is. What of it?"

"Then, I arrest you—for murder," replied the man, placing his hand lightly on Solomon's arm.

"Murder! Whose murder?" asked Solomon, in a hoarse whisper, his face blanched, and his whole frame shaking as with palsy.

"For the murder of the driver Piet, who was poisoned at the hospital in Kimberley. You must please come with me, sir," replied the inspector quietly.

It was, of course, useless to think of resistance ; and so Solomon, who had been dancing, making love, and drinking champagne till nearly daybreak, walked up to the magistrate's office in front of the inspector, before ten o'clock of the same morning, to be formally delivered into custody for transmission to Kimberley, charged with one of the most diabolical and cold-blooded crimes ever committed in South Africa.

And Fanny, his *fiancée* of a few hours, is sitting, looking almost beautiful, and so happy, in her pretty morning dress, waiting breakfast for him.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOZZLE AND BROCHIA

THE worthy magistrate stared when he saw who the Solomon Davis was, the warrant for whose arrest he had countersigned only the night before. He had met Solomon at various houses, at card-parties and social evenings; and to have him brought before him on a charge of murder was somewhat startling, to say the least of it. However he had his duty to do, and that was not difficult, for it simply consisted in signing an order for the removal of the prisoner to Kimberley.

Solomon, who had apparently regained his self-possession, though he looked very white, and had an occasional fit of shivering, as he stood supporting himself with both hands on the rail in front of the magistrate's desk, asked, when the order had been made out and handed to the inspector in charge of him, to be allowed to send a messenger to Mr. Blowser. The magistrate thought for a moment, and then looking up over his spectacles at Solomon, and noticing the pain in his blanched face, said—"Yes, I will send for him now. You can wait and see him here."

A constable was despatched by the magistrate with an urgent request that Mr. Blowser would repair to his

private office at once, and a few minutes afterwards that worthy man was shown, puffing and blowing, into the room by a police-sergeant.

The inspector retired at a word from the magistrate, and Solomon and the father of the woman to whom he had so lately plighted his faith stood at the table facing each other. Solomon essayed in vain to find words to explain his awful predicament. Mr. Blowser could not understand. He had been at the dance, but had left early; and the conclusion he formed, on seeing his prospective son-in-law in the magistrate's office, was that he had over-indulged after the party, and been guilty of some boyish prank for which bail and possibly damages were demanded. Poor Solomon tried hard to make matters clear to the old gentleman, but it was hopeless. Mr. Blowser turned to the magistrate and said—"Come, come—don't be 'ard on the boy. You and I have been out on a bit of a spree once or twice. Boys will be boys, you know. And, let me tell you a secret—'e was only engaged to my darter yesterday."

The magistrate looked helplessly, first at Mr. Blowser, then at Solomon. "This is very painful," he said. And then he beckoned the innocent, unsuspecting old store-keeper to come close to his desk. In a low voice he put the matter so plainly that even Mr. Blowser's somewhat foggy intellect could not fail to comprehend the nature, if not the whole extent, of the catastrophe.

"My God! My God! 'ow hawful. Of course 'e ain't guilty, I knows that well enough. But oh 'ow shocking. It'll kill my darter; it'll kill my pore wife; and I'm damned if I don't think it'll be the death of me; and he

sat down heavily on a rickety wooden chair, which broke all to pieces under his weight, and deposited the poor old man, a most undignified picture of paternal grief, on the floor.

"Come, Blowser, you must not give way like that," said the magistrate kindly, rising and assisting him to his feet. "It is a shocking affair, especially happening just when it has. But no doubt your young friend here will be able to prove his innocence. And, if you will take my advice, you will proceed to Kimberley to watch the case and be of what assistance you may be able. I can do nothing in the matter, not even accept bail, which I would willingly do if it were in my power. But the case is out of my hands entirely."

It is unnecessary to describe the manner in which Solomon spent the rest of that terrible day. He seemed completely dazed; moved mechanically, when told to do so, but did not once open his lips, until he was being put into the train for Cradock at seven o'clock that evening, when he begged the inspector, who was to accompany him, not to subject him to the painful indignity of having to wear handcuffs. The inspector looked at his captive for a moment and said, "Well, all right. But, mind, if you attempt any nonsense, I am heeled," tapping his hip-pocket significantly, whence the handle of a revolver projected. Solomon smiled in a sickly way, as if an attempt to escape were very far from his thoughts, and saying nothing in reply to the officer, lay back in the corner of the railway-carriage and closed his eyes.

Poor Mr. Blowser reached home a short time after his

interview with the magistrate and Solomon, in a most pitiable state of mind. It was a long while before he could make either Fanny or his wife understand that Solomon had been arrested on a charge of murder. When, finally, the older lady did comprehend the truth, she went into a violent fit of hysterics, and had to be carried off to bed and attended by a doctor. Fanny only turned very white and bit her lips; other signs of weakness she showed none. Her questions could only elicit from her father the bare fact that the charge was that of causing the death of the driver Piet by means of poison; more he either did not understand or could not remember being told by the magistrate. Presently Fanny disappeared, and her father did not see her again until tiffin, when she asked him quietly, "Father, what time does the train for Cradock leave to-night?"

"Seven o'clock, I think, my dear," replied the old gentleman, "but why do you want to know?"

"Because I mean to travel by it," replied she, composedly. Mr. Blowser raised some objection at first, but finally decided that it was the right thing to do, nay more, he determined to accompany her himself. And so it happened that the accused, the woman to whom he was engaged, and her father travelled by the same train to Cradock, and in the same coach to Kimberley. Solomon was brought before the magistrate for his preliminary examination a day or two after his arrival in Kimberley, when the evidence against him was read over. The only witnesses for the Crown were the two men who had seen Solomon drop a grape into the street. The evidence of the doctors who performed the

post-mortem was also put in. Solomon, on the advice of his Counsel, reserved his defence, and was committed for trial, bail being refused, although Mr. Blowser offered any amount up to £20,000.

Happily for Solomon and his friends, the criminal sessions of the High Court were to open in about a fortnight ; and he elected to accept short service, as the lawyers call it, and be tried then, sooner than wait some three months for the next sitting of the Court. Fanny, her father, Joe, and many of his Kimberley friends visited him frequently in gaol, bringing him such luxuries and other matters as the regulations permitted. No one doubted his innocence for a moment ; in fact many went so far as to say that the authorities were very ill-advised to prosecute Solomon on such questionable evidence as that on which he had been arrested. What the authorities thought about it is impossible to say ; at any rate, they showed no signs of relaxing their efforts to secure a conviction.

As the day of his trial approached, Solomon seemed to lose heart, and grew morbid and melancholy. Two of the best lawyers on the Fields had been retained to defend him, and they had been hard at work for days, endeavouring to obtain evidence in favour of Solomon's character ; and especially as to his invariable kindness and liberality towards the murdered man, and trying to rake up facts discreditable to the only two witnesses against their client. Solomon, however, seemed to take but little interest in their researches, and behaved more like a man who feels certain that he will be convicted, than one whose evidence most people considered as good as established

already. A doctor attended him, at the request of Mr. Blowser, and tried to tinker up his failing nerves with strychnine, iron, and quinine. But when Solomon asked what it was made the stuff so bitter, and was told strychnine, he steadily refused to touch another drop of it. The doctor, naturally enough, connected this odd conduct with the fact that strychnine was the drug which had caused the death of the unfortunate driver, and came to the conclusion that his patient's mind was more affected than his body.

However, the day of the trial dawned at length ; and after sundry other cases had been disposed of, Solomon Davis was brought from some mysterious recess, and placed in the dock, charged with the wilful murder of one Boy Piet, a coloured driver, lately in prisoner's employ. The Court was crammed to overflowing, and the pressure of the crowd without the barrier was so powerful that the stout rail creaked and bent, threatening every moment to give way and precipitate the struggling throng amongst witnesses, lawyers, and constables, if not to demolish the bench itself. A strong body of constables were ordered to force the crowd back, and at length succeeded in doing so, getting considerably crushed themselves in the process. But it was long before silence could be obtained ; and even when the spectators inside the Court, who could see little and hear less of what was going forward, were reduced to something approaching order, those outside, who could neither see nor hear anything, kept up a continual buzz of conversation that interfered materially with the progress of the trial.

The day was not one of those blazing hot days on which the atmosphere of the High Court of Kimberley used to remind one of a steamer's stoke-hole in the Red Sea ; but it was much too warm for comfort, and the varied exhalations from the dense, perspiring crowd soon reduced the air to a condition almost as mephitic and irritating to the lungs as the Londoner is accustomed to on the worst-ventilated sections of the Metropolitan Railway. The Bench and Bar of Kimberley were indeed to be pitied in the days of the old courts : the idea of the dignity of the law was not easy to maintain in those evil-smelling kennels.

The jury, to most of whom Solomon was well known, scanned his countenance for a few minutes with some degree of interest, and then began whispering to each other about the price of mining stocks and other important topics of the day. The preliminaries having been gone through in the slipshod manner common to all South African law courts, Solomon, on being asked to plead, declared himself not guilty, and the case proceeded.

The cause of death was proved by the doctors to have been strychnine, according to the evidence given before the magistrate ; and the medical witnesses agreed that it was quite possible the drug might have been administered through the vehicle of grapes or other fruit. Solomon's Counsel declined to cross-examine the disciples of Æsculapius, and their place in the box was taken by the man whom Solomon had caught watching the house in Currey Street, and who gave the non-committal patronymic of Thomas Jones. His evidence briefly amounted to this:—

He was a man who was in the habit of doing odd jobs of various kinds ; had no regular place of residence ; had been a barman, billiard-marker, smouse, quack-doctor, bogus missionary ; might have done a little at the cards, but didn't remember when or where—a man must get his living somehow, your lordship—and he did not recollect ever having been before the court in Kimberley. Remembered the death of Piet, and the inquest, and the mention of the grapes. Thought nothing of it at the time, because he had a little business on with his “pal,” business which took him down to Cape Town and kept him there for some time. While there, he and his “pal” were talking one night, when they happened to get on to the subject of the supposed poisoning case at the hospital, which had been a good deal spoken of in the Kimberley papers ; and, in course of the conversation, he remembered the incident of their having seen the grape drop from the hand of a man, standing at an open window in — Street, on the afternoon of the day on which the driver Piet had died. He remembered watching the man turning over an object in his hands, apparently testing it with some metal instrument, which he took to be a file. He might have been piercing the grape and putting powder of some kind into it. When the man at the window looked up and saw him and his “pal” on the opposite side of the street, he started back and let what was in his hand fall. He and his “pal” rushed over to pick it up—thinking it was a diamond—but in the struggle it rolled into the gutter, and they saw it was only a grape, and there they left it. He had but a momentary glance at the man's face when he looked

up ; before that he had been standing with his head bent over his hands, and it was impossible to get a good view of his face. His "pal" and he agreed that there "might be something in it," and on his return to Kimberley he mentioned what he had seen to Detective Phangsky, who took him to Currey Street, pointed out a certain house, and told him to watch it. For some days he did so with no result, but one afternoon, when he and Detective Phangsky were at Old de Beer's on some other business, he saw the man drive by in a cart, and immediately pointed him out to his companion. The reason his "pal" was unable to take his share in endeavouring to effect the identification was, that he was in "a little bit of trouble" at the time ; and in fact had only got out of it on the day before the present trial. Solomon's counsel again declined to cross-examine, much to the astonishment of every one in court.

The prisoner, who had had several conferences with his lawyers, now began to look much more confident. The "Pal," whose ostensible name was George James, followed in corroboration of the previous witness, whose evidence he repeated without any important discrepancies. When the prosecution had finished with him, Solomon's counsel rose and demanded, "Were you not convicted of contravening the Diamond Ordinance, under the name of Charles Raphael, on the 3rd August, 18—, and sentenced to two years' hard labour?"

The witness looked round questioningly towards the Crown lawyers, but there was no help for him there.

The jury said sharply, "Answer the question, sir, at once, and remember you are on your oath."

"Yes, I was, then," said Mr. Raphael, or James, as if he didn't feel much ashamed of the fact, and cared not a jot who knew it.

The Counsel sat down, saying, "My lord, I have no more questions."

If the spectators had been astonished before, they were fairly astounded now, for this was understood to be the last witness the Crown would call.

And so it proved. The Crown prosecutor addressed the jury for the prosecution, pointing out that, though the evidence of James might not be considered worthy of credence, it must still carry some weight as a corroboration of Jones's evidence, which remained entirely unshaken, inasmuch as the prisoner's Counsel had not even attempted to cross-examine him. To his mind, and doubtless to those of the enlightened and conscientious gentlemen in the jury-box, it was abundantly clear that the prisoner, for his own ends, whatever they might be—and here he would take leave to remind the jury that the murdered man might have been an important witness in another murder case, that of Doctor Bunton and Mr. Caldecott, with which also it was not impossible that the prisoner was in some mysterious manner connected;—the prisoner, he said, had been guilty of one of the most fiendish crimes that had ever stained South African annals. After which, and a good deal more to the same effect, he made an earnest appeal to the jury to uphold the cause of right and justice by recording their verdict against the prisoner, and sat down, whispering to his neighbour as he settled his wig—"I think that ought to fetch them, eh?"

There was a pause for a few minutes, and then Solomon's counsel, a good-tempered-looking little man, with a merry twinkle in his eye, rose and opened his defence by calling Fanny Blowser, who tripped into the box, looking so modest and maidenly in her neat-fitting black silk dress, that a general murmur of approval went round the court. The judge looked up quickly, as if about to check it, but being a man of taste and a kind-hearted man into the bargain, he smiled approvingly, and let the murmur subside as it liked.

Fanny's evidence was a simple, straightforward statement of the facts, so far as she was cognizant of them, and told strongly in Solomon's favour with the jury, especially when she bore witness to the many kindnesses Piet had received at his late master's hands while he was in the hospital. The Crown lawyer, in cross-examining her, asked whether while she was out of the sitting-room, preparing for her walk to the hospital with Solomon, the latter had not ample time to puncture some of the grapes, insert a few grains of poison into each, and return them to the basket on the sideboard. Fanny replied that she had no idea how long such an operation would take, but that she was sure she could not have been away more than two or at the outside three minutes. There was nothing to show that the basket of grapes had been touched when she took it up on leaving the room with Mr. Davis.

His next and last question was—"Miss Blowser, is it true that you are engaged to be married to the ——er—to Mr. Davis?"

"Perfectly true," answered she, looking up into the eyes of the jury as if she were proud of it.

The next witness put into the box by Solomon's counsel was a curious specimen of humanity ; a little wizened-faced, grey-haired, bent-backed, and bow-kneed atrocity, standing barely four feet in the doubled-up position which seemed the nearest approach he could manage to the perpendicular. The only remarkable feature about his face was a pair of very bright, light-blue eyes, which resembled more the visual organs of a child of six years old than those of a withered, dissipated old sinner of sixty.

The judge put on his glasses and stared at this extraordinary figure for fully a minute, while the registrar was swearing him.

"What did you say your name was?" at last demanded the judge.

"Bismark, please your worship, I mean lordship," was the reply, in a reedy, cracked voice.

"Bismark who?"

"Only Bismark, your lordship's worship."

"What do you know about the case?"

"If your lordship will permit me to ask the witness a few questions, I think I shall be able to make him tell his story intelligibly," interrupted Solomon's counsel.

Having received the required permission, the following statement, which I have translated into English, was elicited—

"I was formerly a jockey, but broke my back three

years ago at Cape Town races, and have not been able to ride since. I am now helper in Mr. ——'s stables. I have been in Kimberley before frequently, and know both Jones—whose right name is Moss—and Raphael. I remember Raphael being convicted of illicit diamond buying. Both Jones—I mean Moss—and he used to frequent the races at various places with under-and-over tables, three-card monte, the canary trick, and so on. I don't know about their characters, but I should put 'em both down shady. I happened to be going down —— Street one day in—" (naming the date of Piet's death)—"when I saw Moss and Raphael talking very confidential under a verandah. I got into a bit of a passage close by and watched them, and I noticed they were looking very hard at a window opposite. I could not see any one at the window from where I stood; but presently I saw the two of them make a rush across the street, and I came out and watched them. Raphael stooped down and made a grab at something, and Moss shoved him away, and then they both burst out laughing, and came across again, Raphael saying something about thinking it was a diamond, and turning out a—I think he said 'blasted'—grape. Well, they went away down the street, and I, out of curiosity or something or other, walked over and found a fine big grape lying close to the wooden curbing."

The excitement was intense; but his questioner paused for a moment, as if to collect his thoughts. And the witness's incongruously innocent blue eyes wandered round the court, as if he were quite unconscious of

how anxiously many there were awaiting his next few words.

"Well, well," said the judge, "you sawed a grape, you say" (unconsciously falling into the jargon employed by the witness); "what next?"

"Why, I picks 'un oop, your honour's lordship, and swallers him, skin and heverythink," replied the imperturbable ancient with the infantile eyes.

"You ate it?" asked the judge.

"You b'lieve me, I just did so. And worn't it just good neither, beggin' of your lordship's honour's pardon for a sayin' of it."

There was a general giggle from all parts of the court at this reply; in fact it had been all but impossible to keep silence throughout his evidence.

Solomon's counsel took up the parable again—"Well, after you ate that grape, Bismark, what were your sensations?—I mean, what did you feel like?"

"Like as if I could a-swallowed a barrer-load o' the same sort," responded Bismark.

"Oh, then you had no pain in the abdominal region—stomach-ache, you know—you didn't feel sick, or in any way uncomfortable?"

"What, me get sick arter eatin' one grape! Who are yer a-gettin' at, mister? In course I didn't feel sick; not me!"

Solomon's counsel sat down with a beaming smile on his face, and the other side took the witness in hand. But he had been splendidly drilled; they could do nothing with him, and had to give him up in despair.

Joe was called, and spoke to the uniform kindness Solomon had always shown towards himself and all the late firm's *employés*. He was not cross-examined.

The counsel for the defence rose and was about to address the jury when the foreman stood up and said, "Your lordship, we are all agreed on our verdict, and we submit that it is not necessary to hear the counsel for the defence."

The judge bowed and said, "Mr. —, I don't think you need make any remarks on the case; the jury have made up their minds, and so have I. There is not a tittle of evidence against the prisoner at the bar, and I shall instruct the jury to return a verdict of Not Guilty, which I am confident is that upon which they had agreed."

The foreman rose, and said it was even so, but that they further wished to express their sympathy with the prisoner, that he, an innocent man, had been placed in so terrible a position, and subjected, together with his friends, to so much expense and annoyance.

The judge embodied the wishes of the jury in a neat little address, winding up by a complimentary reference to Miss Blowser, and an assurance to Solomon that he left the court without the slightest stain upon his character. He also reverted, in severe terms, to the short-sightedness of the Crown prosecutor in allowing so trumpery a case to come to trial. The verdict and the judge's remarks met with some applause in court, and when Solomon and his party got outside they received a perfect ovation. Joe came up and shook his old master

by the hand with tears in his eyes. But Bismark somehow slipped off, and no one saw any more of him. Solomon possibly knew what a special item marked B. in his attorney's bill of costs meant ; it was a big item too, no less than £1000. But Solomon paid it ; because, no doubt, he was quite certain that his lawyer would never think of charging him such an amount without seeing that his client got full value for it.

And so the dreaded trial was over, and Solomon free to come and go, without a stain on his character in the eyes of the world, and in those of the woman who had stood by him so unflinchingly, under circumstances where nine out of every ten would have deserted him. There was a very happy family party that evening at Mr. Blowser's lodgings ; the only stranger present being Mr. Heath, who had not been at the trial, being lame and still delicate from the effects of his cart accident.

There is not much more to tell, or at least not to be told here. A few days more and the Blowsters and Solomon found themselves back again in Port Elizabeth. Heath accompanied them, for he was much broken down, and the doctors had ordered him a trip home. Joe was also with if not of the party. He had determined to cut his connection with the Fields for good, and asked to be allowed to go home with his master, as he still persisted in calling Solomon, to look after him on the voyage.

Solomon soon recovered his outward gaiety under the genial influence of Fanny Blowser, who was persuaded to change her somewhat plebeian patronymic for that of our

hero within a month of their departure from Kimberley. The wedding was, for many reasons, a very quiet one ; and after a short spell at the historic honeymoonery at Cadle's, the newly married pair bid adieu to South Africa, and started on their homeward voyage by the same Union steamer that carried Heath and the faithful Joe.

Within a year of their arrival in England Solomon succeeded to a handsome legacy from a somewhat mysterious relative ; and informed the public, through the medium of the *Times*, that thenceforth he should cease to be known as Solomon Davis, but would exist under the more aristocratic signature of Montague Vaughan. His wife was charmed with the new name ; it looked so nice on her visiting-cards. And her friends were charmed with it also, probably for the same reason. Hayes settled his debts to Solomon on being applied to, but never again met him. And Cormack saw him but very seldom. Joe invested his savings in a sporting public, and married his first and last barmaid : his wife set her face resolutely against any successor, and did the work herself. Heath stayed in England for a few months, and then, like all good Americans, betook himself to Paris, where he was enjoying life, as well as a prematurely broken-down constitution would allow him, when last I heard of him. In course of time Mr. and Mrs. Montague Vaughan—who, as Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Davis would never have made their way in London society—by dint of lavish expenditure and adroit toadying, managed to build up for themselves a very pleasant

social position amongst the inhabitants of Bayswater and Kensington. They are now aspiring to further promotion ; and the lady talks to her confidential friends of the possibility of her being presented at an early Drawing-room ; while the husband, over his prime Cubas and midnight hock-and-seltzer, occasionally lets fall a whisper as to his being elected at one of the leading West End Clubs. If they are not happy, it is not their fault—nor mine.

THE END.

